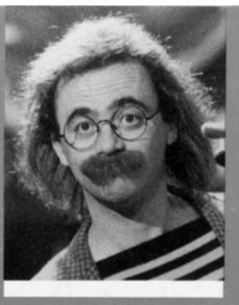
Film Quarterly



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Blaine Allan

Musical Cinema, Music Music Television

"Beat It!" In the compilation documentary, *That's Dancing!,* narrator Gene Kelly introduces the video and points to Michael Jackson as the dancer to whom the torch has been passed from the stars of the classic Hollywood musical. The title of the hit record and accompanying video is also the first spoken line in *West Side Story,* the stage and screen musical and a thematic precursor to Jackson's extended video, *Bad,* a choreographed gang conflict set in a New York City subway. Michael Jackson's debt in his music videos to at least one specimen of the genre is evident, but the significant relations of music videos to the film musical have remained understated in the growing literature on music television. Writers who have commented on music TV from the vantage point of film studies have, perhaps understandably, affirmed the heterogeneity of the images of music video, but they have also demonstrated a disregard

Jody Watley: *Real Love* (photos courtesy MCA)

Video,

Singin' in the Rain

for the sound and the music as a crucial, perhaps even determining fact, in describing the form, its function, and its significance.[1] Such analysis can help illuminate the relations between the musical number in the Hollywood genre film and the music video, and, with a discussion of two recent videos, Paula Abdul's *Straight Up* and Jody Watley's *Real Love,* may start to show up the analogous relations of the number to the musical film and the video to the institution in which it is located, television.

Attempts at critical inquiry into the music video may be fated to remain provisional. They have been fueled by the impulse to declare the music video a signal form of cultural production in the age of postmodernism. While momentarily useful, categorical taxonomies such as E. Ann Kaplan's also constitute a rush to comprehend a cultural phenomenon that is too young to be corralled and can readily change to defy the analyst.[2] The limitations of theorizing the form and applying theoretical insights to the results of production suggest the problems in reconciling genre theory and genre history that Rick Altman points to in his discussion of the Hollywood musical.[3]

In part, the reluctance to explore the kinship of music videos and film musicals reiterates the institutional gaps between studies in the cinema and studies in television. Thus Gregory Lukow discusses the relations between videos and film jukebox formats, such as the Panoram Soundies and Scopitones, and early television productions, including Snader TELEscriptions, while affirming the distinctive position of MTV as a television service; he refers to musical films, including *The Jazz Singer* and *Jailhouse Rock,* that star contemporary performers of popular music, but avoids the Hollywood musical itself.[4] Deborah H. Holdstein valuably compares music video and the musical through their protagonists and stars, and their functions within narrative structure, but treats videos as miniature films rather than as television.[5] Other writers have aimed to establish music video as an autonomous form of contemporary cultural production. Kaplan, for example, describes the reliance of music videos on Hollywood genre cinema for iconography, visual style, or narrative situation, but in terms of parody or pastiche, not broader terms of function or form pertaining to the genre. Thus she compares Madonna's *Material Girl* with the num-

ber from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* that inspired it, through analysis of diegetic spaces—maintaining that the video violates conventions of the classic Hollywood film. Though the discussion specifically compares the video form to the form of the film musical, it is more concerned with the conventions of Hollywood cinema in general than with those of the genre. Furthermore, she asserts that in the music video, "the song-image relationship is unique," explicitly denying the antecedence of the musical (or the opera).[6]

Reluctance to examine these blood relations more closely may have deeper roots, with music video perceived as a threat to the musical. Prescribing for the future of the movie musical, Rick Altman puts its relations to its present-day counterparts in metaphor: "If the musical is to survive very far into its second half-century, rather than succumb to its first cousins MTV and the concert film (as in a monarchy, first cousins are always the most dangerous rivals) . . ."[7] We must put aside this internecine power struggle for a moment and return to the most obvious considerations as starting points to compare the two.

As television forms, the music video and music TV services have subsumed the function of the variety show in disseminating popular music to vast audiences. Few prime-time shows, like Ed Sullivan's or *The Hollywood Palace,* remain to introduce today's Beatles or Buffalo Springfield to North American TV audiences. The network variety programs that survive and feature pop music —most notably *Late Night with David Letterman, Night Music,* and *Saturday Night Live*—have been shunted to late-night slots. There is currently no network program routinely devoted to concert-style performance by today's rock and pop performers, as *The Midnight Special* was in the 1970s. In their place we have the different forms of music television—entire broadcasting services, such as MTV and Country Music Television in the US and Much Music and MusiquePlus in Canada, or individual programs, including *Friday Night Videos* (NBC) and *Good Rockin' Tonight* (CBC).

The music video not only disseminates the music; almost universally it represents and circulates the performer. Although the image track may include narrative, graphic, or documentary visuals, it invariably (even if sometimes briefly or intermittently) shows the performer performing; the music thus gains diegetic status, and appears to come from the world that the video depicts. Rare exceptions that prove the general rule include Foreigner's *I Don't Want to Live Without You* and Bruce Springsteen's *Atlantic City,* which illustrate songs with archival or documentary images, omitting the performers, as well as Lyle Lovett's powerful and evocative black-and-white video, *Pontiac*—in which a haunting song plays over a chain of steely close-ups that suggest the Depression-era portraits of WPA photographers. The concluding portrait depicts Lovett himself, still and not singing, identifiable as the "author" only to viewers who know him to see him or, less decisively, because of his privileged position at the conclusion of the video. A promotion for a theatrical film, *Fight the Power* is illustrated entirely with scenes and slates from *Do the Right Thing,* in which the music plays a crucial role. Although the band Public Enemy is not actually represented in the video, the film character Radio Raheem's boom box stands in as the source of the sound, as it does in the feature film.

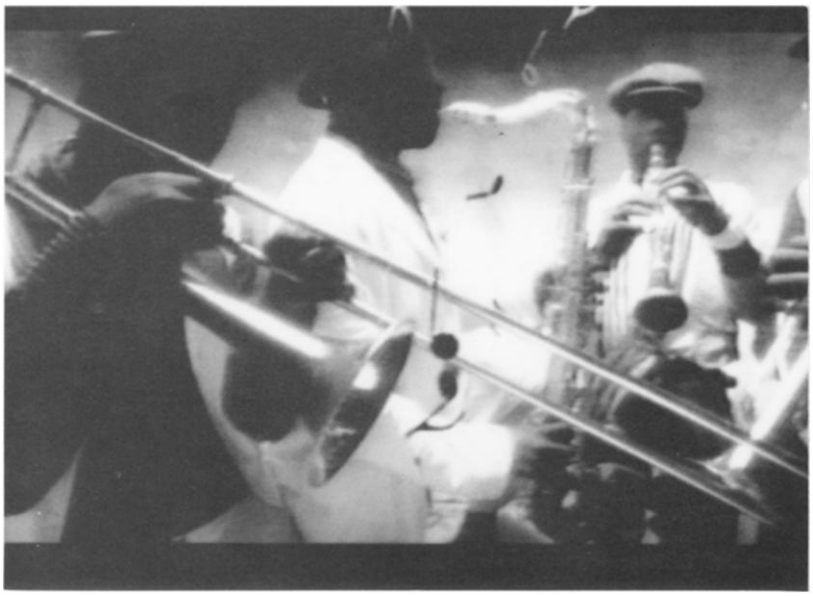
In virtually all music video works, the sound track comprises a single piece of music. Call it a song, a number, a tune, or a cut, it is almost always a complete and unified segment of music. The music video has an integrity as an expressive form (a miniature film, as Holdstein's approach suggests), but it has consistently grown in importance as a form of advertising for the recorded music industry, devoted to selling songs and performances in their reproducible, physical form. The video corresponds to the industry's unit of sales, whether a single unit (such as the 45 rpm disc or cassette single) or part of a larger unit (an album, in LP, cassette, or CD format). More and more frequently, producers are packaging and marketing the video album as a unit in itself, sometimes presented on music TV services as a feature-length production. In addition, videos are becoming available as twelve- or eight-inch laserdiscs, and five-inch CD-video singles, containing up to twenty minutes of audio that may be playable on a conventional CD machine, and five minutes of video. The single has in the past been an important unit of consumption for the recording industry, but marketing has evolved to make the album, whether audio or video, the central unit of current consumption, with the sin-

gle as a sample for the potential buyer. As the video is typically experienced on television, it is this sample function that predominates. Since vinyl discs are fading from the market, and 45s have virtually disappeared, the single is now less an item to be purchased and more one to be consumed via radio or, in video form, on TV—just like other commercials.

As many writers have insisted, perhaps most prominently Marsha Kinder, the visual track of the music video is characterized by heterogeneity, at times apparent incoherence.[8] This is distinctly not true of the music track, which is continuous, though representation of its diegetic source, the performer, may be intermittent. To reinforce its diegetic status, the music may be augmented with sound effects or framed with dialogue. One of the best examples is the full-length version of Michael Jackson's *Bad,* which introduces the song-and-dance with a narrative scripted by Richard Price, and includes a complex blend of sound effects during the musical performance; its complementary parody, *Fat,* emphasizes, perverts, and mocks the design of the sound track, as Weird Al Yankovic's character hears and reacts to the extraneous sounds that punctuate his own movements.

Already conventionalized, the music in a video is virtually never interrupted. In "remix" videos, the equivalent of "dance mixes" or extended versions of singles, the music, compared to the original version, is disrupted, in the way that "scratch mixing" disrupts the rotation of a record; understandably, however, for a dance-oriented version the beat remains insistently continuous. On occasion, music established as diegetic will stop within the video; in the Bangles' *Going Down to Liverpool,* for example, a cab driver shuts off the car radio, momentarily cutting off the music. And again Lyle Lovett provides a notable exception to prove the rule; his video, *If I Had a Boat,* intercuts the singer performing the number with talking head interviews with elderly Southern men. In general, however, once the music starts, it does not stop.

These three points—the representation of a performer or performers of the musical number, the devotion of a video to a single song, and the continuity of the music throughout the segment—raise strong correspondences between the music video and the characteristic musical segments of the film musical genre.



Real Love

The importance of the performer's status is more than incidental in the correspondence of musical films and music videos. Producers' and directors' identities are generally suppressed on pop music television, with principal authorship attributed to the performer and, importantly, the recording company.[9] (Interestingly, though, this is less the case on CMT, the country music television service, which has begun to identify producers, directors, and songwriters, in addition to song title, performer, and company.) Although a few names from behind the camera have surfaced, such as Julien Temple's or Mary Lambert's, for the most part, the text is attributed to the performer.

Studies in film authorship over the years have collected the films of directors of musicals such as Rouben Mamoulian or Vincente Minnelli for study, and a few film-makers, most notably Bob Fosse, have arisen in the wake of auteurism as specialists in musicals. Similarly, authorship has made investments in studios and producers, permitting distinctions between a Warner and a Paramount musical, or between the Arthur Freed and Joe Pasternak units at MGM. Yet even within those distinctions, the status of the performer rises as an identifying feature, as it would have done for the contemporary viewer attracted to a movie because of its stars. Thus, in discussing *An American in Paris* or *Singin' in the Rain,* we refer not to Jerry Mulligan or Don Lockwood, but to Gene Kelly. In their book-length studies of musicals, Rick Altman and Jane Feuer use both character and performer names, some-

times scrupulously, sometimes interchangeably, and at times mixing stars and characters—as in Feuer's comment on *On the Town:* " . . . at the end of 'A Day in New York,' Kelly is still without Miss Turnstiles."[10] More recently, perhaps, characters assume a status as characters, distinct from the performers: Sally Bowles in *Cabaret,* created by Liza Minnelli, or Joe Gideon, Roy Scheider's authoritarian director/choreographer in Fosse's autobiographical *All That Jazz.* Scheider is a dramatic actor, for whom singing and dancing in a movie was a surprising anomaly. And with the diminution of the musical within Hollywood production, even song-and-dance stars like Minnelli rarely have the opportunity to perform in movie musicals. Unlike the heyday of the movie musical, from the 1930s to the 1950s, performers nowadays have little chance to create themselves as singing and dancing stars in the movies, a function reserved for television in general and videos within television. Moreover, musicals of the 1970s and 1980s have tended to revolve around show business subjects, where performing is the business of performers. In Fosse's films, as well as *New York, New York, Fame,* and *A Chorus Line,* being a singer or dancer is central to the characters (as is the fantasy of performing in *Pennies from Heaven*).

Of course, the function of videos is not just to represent performers, but to sell them, as Hollywood sold its own singing stars in musicals. In the 1940s, band singer Frank Sinatra was a sensation in concert, on records, and on radio, but untested as an actor or hoofer before *Higher and Higher* and *Anchors Aweigh.* More recently, videos have made stars out of singers who had little chance to hone their performing skills before being put in front of stadiums full of crowds, Madonna being the most evident example. (This is nothing particularly new in the idol-making process of rock music; think back to Fabian, the Monkees, and many others who were overtly packaged and sold before having a chance to prove whether they had the goods in front of real people.) Moreover, as Pat Aufderheide has indicated, using the Monkees as an example, "What was once a scandal, the betrayal of an authentic expression of talent . . . is now standard practice, with points given for witty execution."[11] Performing in video gains distance from actual performing through lip-synching and miming; generally, what we hear and see are the artists acting out the recording as a means of selling themselves and the recording.

Although songs did not always come first in the making of a movie musical, they were and are the building blocks of the genre. Jane Feuer points out that the musical defines music as song, privileging the act of singing and, with it, the linguistic realm of the lyric over "non-representational music," while also retaining greater status for music as song over non-musical speech.[12] Just as important, the song acts as a unit of music within the structure of the film. A musical may, in one sense, interweave narrative, song, incidental music, and other sounds; in a more fundamental sense, it also comprises a simple alternation between song, or musical number, and non-song, or non-musical narrative.[13] While the film as a whole may be the equivalent of an album of music (or may in fact produce one, as a sound track LP), each individual number within the film has its own integrity: the narrative puzzle or problem that motivates it, the statement and development that comprise its body, and the closure of a definite conclusion, whether a noisy, bang-up ending like "Shine On Your Shoes" in *The Band Wagon* or the post-euphoric calm of "Singin' in the Rain," in which Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly, respectively, leave observers watching as they walk off into the night and into the subsequent stage of the narrative.

As a part of the structural dialectic of the musical, the musical number has an autonomous function, but also acts as a transition from one stage of the film narrative to another, and echoes the structure of the whole film as it unfolds from start to finish. In music television, videos are analogously linked to the unfolding of programming; their beginnings often remain imprecise and they frequently do not quite end. As disc jockeys cross-fade music with similar beats to make a sound transition as nearly seamless as possible, so broadcasters use visual and sound techniques to bridge the end of one video into the start of the next. The conclusion of Madonna's *Like a Prayer,* with actual curtain call and "The End" title is, then, a self-aware anomaly, though even it is usually dissolved into the start of a succeeding video when it is broadcast. This is endemic to the myths upon which television has constructed itself: abundance, choice of program,

continuity, and the resulting apparent authority of the viewer. Like the number in the musical film, however, the music video also acts as an agent of transformation for television and for the viewer. As one of the fragments in the continual unfolding of television, among commercials, promotional and public service announcements, news reports, and segments of programs, the music video similarly possesses its own structural integrity, largely predicated on the integrity of the song it features, and acts as a transition from one point in the television schedule to the next.

Typically, in the musical film's song-and-dance numbers, the music runs continuously, though the image track may demonstrate the heterogeneity of a modern music video. In fact, discontinuity editing of one form or another is not at all unusual in the history of the musical film. One need only look back to the early examples of Busby Berkeley's creative geography and impossible staging of musical numbers that, according to the story at least, were being performed on a stage. It is commonplace to note that "I'm Young and Healthy" and "42nd Street," or "Lullabye of Broadway" were conceivable and capable of being realized only as film constructions, though within the fiction of *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1935,* their magic must wow theatrical audiences. By comparison, the strict continuity editing of simpler production numbers, like "Singin' in the Rain" or *The Band Wagon*'s "Dancing in the Dark," is perhaps a rarity. Whether continuous or discontinuous, visually, the numbers are tied together by their musical and aural continuity.

Leslie Caron and Fred Astaire
in *Daddy Longlegs*

Altman notes that diegetic music in the Hollywood musical—which appears to be shot and recorded simultaneously, but is actually prerecorded, shot to playback, and postsynchronized—has because of its technical refinement an "eerie, far-off effect, an injection of the ideal world into the real." From long shot to close-up, the singer may sound the same distance away, and such uniform (or very subtly modified) sound perspective contributes to this ideal-effect. Moreover, he argues that postsynchronized song has a mediating role between the diegetic track (typically dialogue and ambient sounds, recorded and shot simultaneously) and the music track (recorded separately and postsynchronized to image).[14]

Such an ideal-effect pertains to the sound track of the music video, which is more or less identical to the sound recording the video advertises. Despite the fears of purists for the fate of music in the age of the video, the starting point for the production of a video must be the music—the song, the lyrics, the arrangement, the performance, the production, the recording. The recording may be re-mixed for the video, and may not be exactly the same as the audio recording for sale—just as, in the pre-video era, a recording might appear in one version on a 45 rpm single and in a slightly different version as an album cut (or, more recently, may be adjusted and altered for reissue in the digital age of the compact disc). As an example, for the 1989 "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band gathered a couple of dozen country music stars to record the Carter Family standard. Part of the point of such a recording (like the Band Aid, USA for Africa, Northern Lights, and other such charity recordings) is the collectivity and community of raising voices *en masse* in song; for the video, however, the track is mixed to bring up the volume of

individual voices so they can be distinguished above the crowd as individual performers appear onscreen. Interestingly, the ideal-effect implicit in the practice of lip-synching for his first performance video, *Dancing in the Dark,* reportedly perturbed Bruce Springsteen, whose persona revolves around ideas of authenticity and immediate relations with his audience.[15] Although the music in videos typically has a diegetic source, its uniform sound quality refers back to its status as a recording that binds together the image.

Many conventions of classical cinema have of course been adopted as standards of television but among the genres of cinema, it is the musical that most closely corresponds to structures of television itself as it is experienced. Both television and musicals invest heavily in performers (whether, for TV, actors, musicians, news readers, or weather forecasters), as distinct from characters and narratives. Drawing from the radio heritage, television announcers and personalities often have license to address the camera, and hence the viewer, directly; singers and dancers in musicals, adapting stage conventions, perform for an assumed audience, for which the camera stands in. Both forms are built from discrete fragements of drama or narrative and performance, the organization of which may not conform to realist conventions. The notion that musicals consist of interchangeable or thin narratives that function only to link musical numbers may not be entirely fair to the films, but it does suggest the relations of story material to musical sequences, and the structural shifting of music and action that Altman describes. While a musical alternates between non-musical story and song-and-dance sequences, TV lurches from news to commercials to drama to variety.

Although we can draw correspondences between the music video and the musical cinema in formal terms, we must respect textual differences, because the music video is mainly a television form. As such, its producers presume a television viewer, a domestic rather than a public being. Even when shown in more public venues (typically in clubs and bars), it forms part of a fabric of activity including socializing, dancing, and conversation, and does not command sustained and exclusive attention. In her discussion of MTV, the US music television service, Marsha Kinder writes, "In all television, the visual component is privileged over the audio. . ."[16] "Privileged" is a vague word in this context, though I infer that the privileging is that of a writer viewing against the grain by devoting analytic concentration to the screen. Kinder's discussion of MTV's lure, however, seems to assume an almost fixated viewer, more the "spectator" she names in the article's title than a viewer, and does not take account of the material conditions under which people watch MTV or television in general.[17]

In fact, music television acknowledges the role of sound in drawing attention to, or back to, the set.[18] It is structured in small segments, rarely more than five minutes long (notwithstanding the occasional studio interview). TV is a medium of the glance, as John Ellis points out, not the gaze.[19] To use concepts introduced by Raymond Williams and subsequently modified by Ellis, it comprises both undifferentiated flow and agenda-setting segmentation.[20] It is wholly dedicated to selling, whether the products advertised are recorded music or other items. Music TV has brought the medium to a stage where radio arrived in the 1950s, during television's first big push into the consumer market. When radio audiences drifted away, the types of programming that depended on sustained attention—drama, talks, documentary—diminished on the program schedules of commercial radio. Those types of programs migrated to TV, which commanded attention for its novelty and as a dramatic equivalent to the movies. Now more a piece of the furniture, television has been fully incorporated and naturalized as part of daily life. Music TV is in some ways the apotheosis of television as it has developed to date in North America.

The introduction and dissemination of various technologies in the 1980s has adjusted our relations to the set. A remote control means we can select instantly from the increased number of channels; as a result, we may pay greater attention, though in shorter bursts, as we zap commercials or other unwanted signals. Having a videocassette recorder means that we can select what to see and when to see it, or elect to use our TV set to watch a rented cassette, something that is not TV at all. Pay-cable services or public TV services, which run whole segments or programs without interruption, may also suggest we should sit down and pay attention. All

these possibilities contrast with music TV. Along with sports broadcasts, it is technically one of the most innovative and adventurous visual forms available on television. Yet it is also the one that permits you *not* to watch, but to listen continuously until, to put it paradoxically, you hear what you want to watch.

As Kinder points out, the music video adopted the conventions of the television commercial. By that she refers to similarities in "visual style, background music, and short format," and cites "fast montage" in MTV news.[21] She might just as accurately have added the combination of image, text, and graphics, or the multiplicity of images within the television image as specific examples of the fragmented visual style of the commercial or of music television services. To refer to the sound of commercial spots or, especially, of music TV as "background music" understates the importance of the audio track. Even her assertion, "The musical performance always dominates the audio, but varies in the degree to which it controls or is even present in the visuals," while apparently giving due respect to the music and sound with one hand, takes away with the other.[22]

It is certainly possible to emphasize the randomness or the fragmentary nature of music video's iconography or to treat the image track as nonsense, in order to make connections either with the unconscious, as Kinder does, or the irrationalities of the postmodern world.[23] Stress on the heterogeneity of the image track of an individual video, or of the overall programming on music television services, tends to direct attention away from the lure of integration in the form. But in fact, music videos are irrevocably based on the synchronous relations of image and sound, music in particular. That is to say, they rely on formal integration. The functions of the music in this diversified form are those of grounding, unity, and resolution. Here is where the music video draws from the expressive and structural conventions of the Hollywood musical. Rick Altman distinguishes the musical as a narrative film in which musical numbers involving song and dance are incorporated with non-musical story material, thus eliminating most concert or performance documentaries, as well as film opera or a musical narrative such as *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg,* in which there is no "non-musical context against which music is to be measured."[24] A particular rendition of Hollywood cinema's characteristic dualism, the passage between musical and non-musical segments sets into motion a structural dialectic. The genre relies on the expressive possibilities of song and dance in a realistic world represented on film—"realistic" ranging from the authentic though idealized Manhattan of *On the Town*'s opening number to the cinematic conceit of Esther Williams's water ballet with the animated cat and mouse, Tom and Jerry, in *Dangerous When Wet.*

Singin' in the Rain

In order to understand the social position of this apparently frivolous cinema, writers on the musical have commented extensively on the invocation of the utopian in the realms of entertainment and performance upon which the genre depends and within the films themselves.[25] Altman links this meaning to the reversal of sound and image relations he calls the "audio dissolve," in which the music no longer accompanies action, but, in the musical numbers, action accompanies music: "In leaving normal day-to-day causality behind the music creates a utopian space in which all singers and dancers achieve a unity unimaginable in the now superseded world of temporal, psychological causality. The dominance of sound over image serves to unify groups by synchronizing their movements, just as Hollywood itself had to discover special methods of synchronizing independently recorded image and sound in order to develop the musical genre. In daily life

people hear different drummers and thus live their lives out of sync; when music begins to initiate the movements of a couple, they start to move in time to each other because they are hearing the same beat."[26] Music and dance in the Hollywood musical act as a means of addressing a "problem," meaning a situation that demands resolution: Fred Astaire dreams of Ginger Rogers romantically and sexually, but can woo her and couple with her only in the metaphorical form of dance; Gene Kelly/Don Lockwood would like to tell the world about the happiness brought by his new-found love for Debbie Reynolds/Kathy Selden, but can only soliloquize in song and dance, because it is late and, besides, everyone else knows enough to come in out of the rain.

Music videos may be narrative in form, but they rarely have the well-developed narrative frame of even the most flimsy stories proffered by some feature-length musicals. Overtly narrative videos, such as many of Michael Jackson's, including *Beat It, Thriller, Bad,* and *Smooth Criminal,* establish problems that the musical numbers address and resolve, effectively presenting themselves as compact musicals in themselves. Often the utopia that they offer as an alternative or solution to the problem is located in dream or fantasy. This is frequently the case in country music video, in which narratives dominate: in *Let's Get Started (If You're Going to Break My Heart),* the Statler Brothers fantasize exciting identities for themselves as ways of attracting the glamorous women they spot in the airport while waiting for a plane. Another example: in a video for the Trio that was filmed in black-and-white, a man played by Harry Dean Stanton misses his woman; as he melancholically goes about his daily routine, vignette images in color of Linda Ronstadt, Dolly Parton, and Emmylou Harris singing "These Memories of You" fade in and out. Structurally and expressively, these specific cases of videos that are narrative in format are directly related to the musical as a narrative form.

More pertinent to the status of the video as a television form, the music video normally addresses a problem posed by the institution of television itself, which characteristically transforms the commercial into the personal and emotional. It is by now axiomatic that music videos and TV commercial spots are virtually interchangeable. Music videos may have appropriated the rhetoric of the commercial, but the reverse has also been evident, especially with the growth in licensing of pop and rock recordings for advertising. Pat Aufderheide notes, "As commercials in themselves, they have erased the very distinction between the commericals and the program. As nonstop sequences of discontinuous episodes, they have erased the boundaries between programs."[27] A mordant view of television in general holds that commercials are not interruptions of programs, but programs are simply the bits that come between the commercials; music television is 24-hour continual commercial advertising (though a more subversive sympathy might say that it is 24-hours-a-day of interruptions). Kinder avers that music television exposes the "super-text" of television "by erasing the illusory boundaries within its continuous flow of uniform programming and reveals the central mediating position of advertising [in TV] by adopting its formal conventions as the dominant stylistic."[28] However, it is not solely, perhaps not even principally, the style that yields this effect. It is intrinsic to the function of the music video as advertising and the role that it plays in the unfolding of television.

To analyze one or two video clips is to section them from the contiguous body of music television. Isolating an extract from the rush of programming sets up the segment as, on the one hand, typical of the whole and, on the other, exemplary. Paula Abdul's *Straight Up* and Jody Watley's *Real Love,* both produced by the Los Angeles company, Propaganda Films, and directed by David Fincher, were breakthrough video hits in 1989. They both reached high positions on the MTV playlist and number one on MuchMusic, and both performers and recordings were among the top on *Billboard*'s 1989 charts for Pop, Black, and Dance music. Visually heterogeneous, though precisely structured, they reintegrate themselves through music tracks. In each case, the two parts of the video that act as its glue are the music and the performer (perhaps more precisely the body of the performer) from whom the music issues.

Both recordings have consistent, strong dance beats throughout, instrumentation that relies heavily on synthesizers, and backing vocals that incorporate both singing and spoken interjections. Apart

Paula Abdul

from the occasional colorful riff, the most prominent musical features are sharply percussive rhythm and, to carry the words, voice.

The lyrics concern conventional pop themes, which are familiar to the film musical—specifically romance, identity, and the expressions of emotion. The singers in both numbers ask unnamed lovers for true expressions of authentic feelings. Paula Abdul demands that he tell her "straight up" that he will love her forever, that she is not "caught in a hit-and-run."—and if he can't, she'll just kiss him off. In Jody Watley's "Real Love," faced with the possibility of taking back a lover, the singer asserts her independent position. She tells him, if she is going to take him back, he is going to have to "give it up," and the "it" is "real love." "Real love" may alternate between the singular, typically referring to another person, or quantitative, referring to the emotional state. In both cases, it suggests "real love" can be given, taken, and possessed as an object. In an age when pop recordings are turned into the music of television commercials, and readily transformed from saleable objects in themselves into vehicles to sell other products, it is not too difficult to imagine "Real Love" as the brand name of a perfume, the acquisition of which can lead to having "one" or "some" real "real love."

In both cases, the performer addresses the viewer directly. Video form takes advantage of that part of TV rhetoric, drawn from the stage and radio, and shared in conventional narrative cinema only in the asides of comedy or the performance of the musical, that invests some persons onscreen with the knowledge of viewers and listeners and the license to speak directly to them. Both songs outline similar stories, of a woman who knows the kind of love and respect she deserves and the feckless man who might not have them in any quantity. Into the role of the absent lover, they also cast the listener, addressed as "you," and the viewer, whom the performers confront eye-to-camera-to-screen-to-eye. Like much television, videos purport to perform for the individual viewer and, like the musical number, offer the viewer a uniform, integrated experience to be shared unquestioningly.

Music videos incorporate a wide variety of visual styles, so it is impossible to say that *Straight Up* or *Real Love* are representative of the visual style of music TV, although, built as chains of brief shots, they have the fragmentary look typical of music videos. In addition to the integration offered by the music, in both cases the visuals have their own kind of unity and mark themselves as distinct from the frame of conventional television programs —just as the film musical number separates itself from non-musical narrative by adopting a radically different visual style.

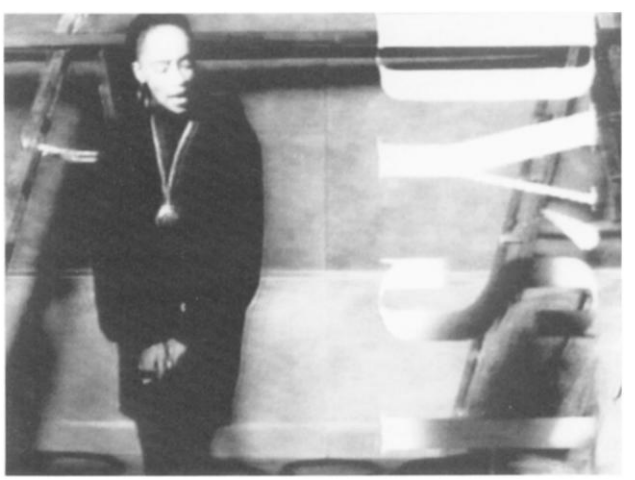
Conventional color television, based in ideas of realism and authenticity, typically presents itself in normal hues. TV practices generally reserve unconventional color patterns and black-and-white (apart from movies, which themselves are being made normal for TV through colorizing) for graphics, commercials, and music TV. Most of her time on screen, Paula Abdul performs in front of backdrops that are white, black, or black on one side and white on the other. The video cuts between her and several men—a dancer performing some exceptionally acrobatic leaps, comic actor and talk show

host Arsenio Hall mugging, among others. The high-contrast, black-and-white pictorial style of *Straight Up* provides the video with one layer of formal coherence. It suggests a shared visual space, even though the woman and the men never appear in the same shot. By contrast, they do share the same aural space; they dance and move to the same tune, and their shared status is stressed when Hall mouths the words that Paula Abdul sings (or, to be rigorous, lipsynchs herself).

Real Love (all illustrations on these two pages)

The visuals of *Real Love* are diversified and form a more complex pattern in large part on account of the number of overall appearances, hairstyles, and costumes literally hung on the body of performer Jody Watley. At least 16 different personas can be inferred from these different appearances and demeanors, each depicted in a different location or a distinctive visual style. Although it is not unusual for performers to be seen in different locations or costumes in a single video, the variety and number of costumes and hairstyles in *Real Love* suggests the video's insistence on the significance of diversity. A few shots fragment Watley's body (notably at the opening: a color shot in which feet in leather boots walk down a wet street at night, synched closely to the beat of the music, and a black-and-white close-up of moving legs in fishnet stockings and feet in high heels), but most shots by far most feature her face and depict her singing. In fact, she is the only person represented with a face, which personalizes and individualizes her among interchangeable or anonymous men. Moreover, apart from a single foot, tapping during one of the breaks, and a male body that breezes through another shot, hers is the only human figure to move.

What is distinctive about the images themselves, in composition and photographic style, is that they all echo styles of advertising, in particular print advertising. Videos, most notoriously Neil Young's *This Note's For You,* have aped known advertising formats for purposes of parody and satire. Virtually every image in *Real Love,* however, could be called a glamor shot, and looks as though it could have been lifted straight from the advertising pages of *Vogue.* With a few exceptions the camera remains motionless or restrained in movement, though the figure moves expressively: languidly, or abruptly and aggressively. Although the



editing pace is rapid, for the most part the individual shots are tableaus. In fact, presenting Jody Watley dressed in a yellow, feathery garment in a photo studio with a grey backdrop, one set-up documents (or, more probably, re-creates) the photo session for the jacket of *Larger than Life,* the album that contains "Real Love."

In both cases, the music track itself, framed as a song and running uninterrupted, underscores the lure of integration within the video. The visuals anchor the lyrics, the music and the sound, and finally the star, in a style intended to integrate the diverse parts, and to deliver both desire and source of satisfaction in the same message.

Music videos frequently upset people and institutions, often over content (ranging from the reli-

gious and racist imagery in *Like a Prayer,* which prompted Pepsi-Cola to sever its relations with Madonna, to the visual treatment of women in clips with David Lee Roth, the Beastie Boys, and many heavy metal bands). But music videos are not inherently disturbing in form. What heterogeneity they possess is re-unified through the performer and through the music. Similarly, while the musical film sidesteps some conventions of realism, permitting characters to break into song and dance, it is not formally disruptive. If a musical is disturbing, generally it is again on the level of content, when a film flouts expectations by setting themes more troubling than romance to music, as in *All That Jazz* or *Pennies from Heaven.* In fact, in both forms, performers and music almost always act as agents of emotional satisfaction.

Though perhaps not as direct an ancestor to music video as the Scopitones or Soundies, the musical film established the basic modes of embedding representation, performance, and music within a larger, unfolding framework. For the musical film it is fiction, in which musical numbers act as a transition from narrative fragment to narrative fragment; for music video it is television, which in itself comprises a diversity of fragments. The musical and music video may aspire to formal (and hence ideal and social) integration, but also demonstrate the limits of those aspirations.

Notes

1. Rick Altman recognizes the shortcomings of analysis of the Hollywood musical that privilege the visual and suppress the audible; see his laudatory and cautionary introduction to Raymond Bellour's scrutiny of a fragment from *Gigi:* "Segmenting/ Analysing," in *Genre: The Musical,* ed. Altman. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul/British Film Institute, 1981), 102–03.
2. See E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
3. Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), 93–94.
4. Gregory Lukow, "The Archaeology of Music Video: Soundies, Snader Telescriptions, and Scopitones," in *1986 National Video Festival.* (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1986), 36–39.
5. Deborah H. Holdstein, "Music Video: Messages and Structures," *Jump Cut,* No. 29 (1984), pp. 1, 13–14.
6. See Kaplan, "Feminist Criticism and Television," in Robert C. Allen, ed. *Channels of Discourse* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1987), 243; also Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock,* 116–27.

7. Altman, *American Film Musical,* 363.
8. Marsha Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology, and Dream," *Film Quarterly* 38, No. 1 (Fall 1984), pp. 2–15; rpt. in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: the Critical View.* Fourth edition. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 229–54. See also Pat Aufderheide, "Music Videos: The Look of the Sound," in Todd Gitlin, ed., *Watching Television* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 111–35.
9. See Aufderheide, "The Look of the Sound," 116.
10. See Altman, *American Film Musical, passim,* and Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982), *passim* and 75.
11. Aufderheide, "The Look of the Sound," 124.
12. Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical,* 52.
13. See Altman, *American Film Musical,* 16–58, on the dualistic structure of the musical film.
14. Altman, *American Film Musical,* 64.
15. Dave Marsh, *Glory Days: Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), 191.
16. Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator," 5.
17. See Peter Collett, "Watching People Watching Television," Report to the Independent Broadcasting Authority, February 1986; Jane Root, *Open the Box* (London: Comedia, 1986), 25–29.
18. See Rick Altman, "Television Sound," in Newcomb, *Television: The Critical View,* 566–84.
19. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 163.
20. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974), 86–96; Ellis, *Visible Fictions,* 117–18.
21. Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator," 5.
22. Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator," 5.
23. See Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator"; Aufderheide, "The Look of the Sound"; Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock.*
24. Altman, *American Film Musical,* 107.
25. See Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," *Movie,* No. 24 (Spring 1977), 2–13.
26. Altman, *American Film Musical,* 69.
27. Aufderheide, "The Look of the Sound," 111.
28. Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator," 5.

Münchhausen: The baron (Hans Albers) at the beck and call of Catherine the Great (Brigitte Horney)

I

Josef von Baky's *Münchhausen* presents a seeming anomaly: it is a self-reflexive film in an age not exactly rife with self-reflexivity. The lavish Ufa color production premiered at the studio's state-sponsored 25th anniversary on March 5, 1943, at a point when World War II had taken a disastrous turn for Germany. It was a spectacle that audiences greeted enthusiastically, as did the Ministry of Propaganda, which took pride in "the most modern example of German film art."[2] Subsequent critics throughout the world ascribe to it—as many contemporaries reputedly did in 1943—an oppositional and subversive energy; it remains widely shown and warmly received, an entertainment that, in the words of a West German critic writing in 1978, provides "some fond memories from otherwise bad times."[3] A representative film, then, with an exceptional status: what are we to make of this apparent contradiction? As we will see, this disparity is not necessarily the result of misunderstanding.

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7. Altman, *American Film Musical,* 363.
8. Marsha Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology, and Dream," *Film Quarterly* 38, No. 1 (Fall 1984), pp. 2–15; rpt. in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: the Critical View.* Fourth edition. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 229–54. See also Pat Aufderheide, "Music Videos: The Look of the Sound," in Todd Gitlin, ed., *Watching Television* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 111–35.
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I

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To anticipate my conclusion: *Münchhausen,* an opulent spectacle commissioned by the Nazi regime in the midst of World War II, is a film whose reflex-

Eric Rentschler

The Triumph of Male Will: *Münchhausen* (1943)[1]

ivity both mystifies and self-exposes. It enchants children in matinee screenings with its technical wizardry and undeniable good cheer; it pleases more sophisticated spectators by dint of a flamboyant charm and irrepressible vigor. At the same time, though, *Münchhausen* allows glimpses of other energies, disclosing its own workings as the function of wishful thinking and, in so doing, revealing more profound motivations. It is an example of fascinating and fantasizing fascism, a work whose self-reflexivity reveals an unwitting auto-reflection, mirroring at once the operations of cynical reason and those of male fantasy production.

II

The narrative features the famous raconteur, Baron von Münchhausen, a historical figure (1720 -1797), whose fictional transfigurations in late-eighteenth and nineteenth century tales gained international renown. These improbable first-person narratives sustain an inimitable humor, a blend of tongue in cheek and hyperbole. The Münchhausen tales reflect copious borrowings from European tradition (above all, popular travel literature); their provenance is uncertain, but they were apparently the product of a German exile in England on the run from creditors, Rudolf Erich Raspe. Once they were published in the 1780s, the adventures of Münchhausen were immediately translated into German, and numerous subsequent editions, variant versions, and sequels ensued, involving multiple authors and entrepreneurs.[4] (Squabbles over rights to this property extend into the late 1980s.) A creative spirit who celebrates the powers of fantasy and imagination, the "Liar Baron" would later become a continuing presence in film history as well, from Georges Méliès's fantasy of 1912 to the animated renderings by Emile Cohl (1913) and Karl Zeman (1961), and most recently in Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1988). Like its counterpart from World War II, the Gilliam version is a long-awaited and expensive production, science fiction set in the past but bearing on the present, with a frame story directed at an inscribed audience.

The 1943 film opens in what appears to be an eighteenth-century milieu, at a rococo ball hosted by Münchhausen—a birthday celebration for his elderly wife. The historical backdrop quickly proves to be an illusion: a flirtatious young woman, unsuccessful in her attempt to seduce the baron, leaves the castle in a huff and jumps into a sports car—one indication among many others to follow that we have been witness to a costume party, that the film's true setting is a modern world of electricity and tangos. A few days later, Münchhausen relates in flashback the tale of his famous ancestor to an intimate circle, including a student of Münchhausiana, the Freiherr von Hartenfeld, and his fiancée, the vexatious coquette from the previous evening's party.

He begins with Münchhausen, accompanied by his loyal servant Christian, returning to his father's home in eighteenth-century Bodenwerder. The master and his valet then join their sovereign, Prince Carl of Brunswick, accompanying him to the Court of Catherine II. Stopping enroute, Münchhausen encounters the sinister Cagliostro, who tries without success to enlist the baron in a campaign to take over Poland. In St. Petersburg, Münchhausen becomes the Adjutant General and lover of Catherine II. Wounded in a duel, he retreats to

Cagliostro, warning the former adversary of an imminent arrest. To express his gratitude, the illusionist gives the baron a ring of invisibility and grants him the gift of lasting youth. Serving in Russia's war against the Turks, the baron is taken prisoner and transferred to the seraglio of the Sultan in Constantinople. He escapes with Princess Isabelle d'Este, with whom he flees to Venice. Pursued by the Inquisition, Münchhausen commandeers a balloon and travels with his servant to the moon. An exotic and bizarre landscape, indeed, the moon is a space where one day is equivalent to a single earth year. Subject to these laws of time, Christian ages rapidly and soon expires. Münchhausen, noticeably troubled but still immortal, goes back to earth. In a return to the narrative frame, the present-day Münchhausen reveals that he indeed is the old baron, a confession that shocks the young couple, who depart hastily. Now alone with his aging wife, Münchhausen decides to join her, give up his immortality, and grow old together: "I demand everything!" he avers, "I also want—the rest!"

III

Münchhausen has long captivated audiences—upon its premiere in 1943, during postwar reprises, and since its reconstruction and re-release in 1978, an enthusiasm that continues unabated to the present day.[5] Critics have spoken of it as an exceptional film, on at least four counts:

- As a production, *Münchhausen* enjoyed a privileged status. In preparation for Ufa's 25th anniversary, Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, ordered that no cost be spared in the making of a film meant to showcase German cinema's international flair, a film replete with elaborate special effects, a host of prominent stars, exorbitant sets and costumes, extensive location shooting, not to mention striking color choreography.[6] Despite official reservations, Erich Kästner, an oppositional writer disliked by the government and not allowed to publish in Germany, was enlisted to provide the screenplay.[7] The scenario would contain acerbic asides like the baron's remark on the moon that not his watch, but indeed time itself was "kaputt," as well as a reference to the "night and fog" activities of secret police, that were taken by many contemporaries as examples of the film's ideological nonconformity—an outspokenness, claim some critics, compounded by Kästner's pseudonym, Berthold Bürger, whose initials recalled a blacklisted colleague living in exile.
- Aesthetically, *Münchhausen* also stands out as one of very few Nazi films with a forthrightly reflexive construction. For the most part, features made in the Third Reich take place in self-enclosed worlds and do not draw attention to the impact of forces outside the text. As Goebbels wrote in his diary on 1 March 1942:

> Even entertainment can be politically of special value, because the moment a person is conscious of propaganda, propaganda becomes ineffective. However, as soon as propaganda as a tendency, as a characteristic, as an attitude remains in the background and becomes apparent through human beings, then propaganda becomes effective in every respect.[8]

Münchhausen in contrast presents a self-conscious tale-teller, indeed a famous liar from cultural history, a painted icon that winks at the audience in the film's opening shot in an animated special effect, establishing a relationship between a hero who fabricates tales and a medium that trades in illu-

The perils of being abroad: Münchhausen held captive by the sultan

sions, a correspondence between the cinema as medium and Münchhausen as medium for a national cinema. The first shot pictures an exhibitionist who acknowledges his offscreen audience. The initial sequence as a whole plays with the spectator, demonstrating cinema's imaginary constitution and our investment in this illusion. We are tricked first into believing a fraud and then confronted with the knowledge that the pre-modern setting was only the semblance of one, realizing that we have succumbed to the seductive charms of the medium and been taken in by the cinema's onscreen representative, Münchhausen. Rarely did the Nazi cinema so graphically reveal its awareness of the captivating potential of this particular technology and its subtle powers of public persuasion.

▪ Much more directly than other Nazi films, *Münchhausen* allows characters to express and even act on sexual desire. Hans Albers in the lead role displays a body language quite different from the controlled and contained physicality characteristic of his male counterparts.[9] He carries himself with a lightness and swagger, openly voicing his appetites, a rarity in a cinema where a sexual male invariably means a diminished one. Even more surprisingly, we find a female figure, Catherine, who admits sexual attraction, who controls men through her erotic presence and determines their comings and goings—and is not punished in the narrative for doing so.[10] Nazi cinema, according to Karsten Witte, typically arouses desires for visual pleasures that it ultimately leaves unfulfilled, for fascist aesthetics embody a great fear of chaos, decadence, and sensuality, any property which might elude control, especially unharnessed female eroticism.[11] *Münchhausen* valorizes a promiscuous hero; it contains an abundance of suggestive dialogues and unabashedly sexual encounters; in addition, it has at its center a phallic woman. (During the banquet scene in Catherine's palace, one of her male guests avers that it is unjust to speak of Catherine "die Grosse," i.e., to use the female appellation; rather she should be called Catharine *"der Grosse."*) At least one critic has spoken of the film as "a programmatic denial of National Socialism's official policy" in matters of sex and gender coding.[12]

▪ The 1943 production is one of very few films of the fantastic in the Third Reich.[13] Films of the era tend to occupy space, to organize the entire frame, inhibiting freedom of movement and behavior. For this reason, wanderers are always suspicious or tragic figures in Nazi films; individuals who move about without goal or direction invariably come to a bad end. To go abroad in Nazi cinema means to be potentially attracted to the foreign, to be distanced from the homeland and all sources of good health, security, and stability. Travelling and wandering give rise to a certain dissolution of one's identity and person; characters get lost in the undifferentiated and disordered mass of an alien culture. As a result one loses one's self, one's past, one's presence.[14] The film of the fantastic had been, of course, one of the most significant genres in Weimar cinema, perhaps even the hallmark of classical German film. But it was apparently for the Nazis too rife with subversive potential, encompassing alternative worlds, flights of imagination, expressions of intoxication and exhilaration, the realms of the irrational, inexplicable, and uncontrollable.[15]

Nazi cinema, for all its reliance on the romantic legacy in its productions and on the power of the irrational in its constructions, rarely took recourse to the fantastic.[16] Perhaps the era's true films of the fantastic remain documentaries like *Triumph of the Will (Triumph des Willens,* 1935), a delirious vision

of mass submission to demonic authority in a frenzied realm of ritual, incantation, and self-sacrifice.[17] The state created a convincing and all-encompassing fictional world, staging the fantastic in the everyday; by and large, it did not see fit to promote this potential in its films.[18]

For all these reasons, *Münchhausen* has gone into film history as a decided exception among the features of the Third Reich, an episodic tale whose hero is a wanderer and a womanizer, a work that consciously plays with illusion and proudly flaunts its imaginary allure. It contains a wealth of artificial and expansive settings, such as the busy fair and market place in St. Petersburg, the ornate court of St. Petersburg, Cagliostro's eerie laboratory, the harem of the Sultan, Carnival in Venice, the moon phantasmagoria. Something like Nazi cinema's *The Wizard of Oz,* the film celebrates a protagonist immune to the laws of time, whose eternal youth and unfailing energy are special effects stemming from an act of magic. Truly a cinema of enchantment, *Münchhausen* reaches back to the playfulness of Méliès, drawing on Disney and *The Thief of Bagdad,* constituting an undoubtedly international endeavor, the grand exception, so it would seem, among the roughly 1100 feature films completed in Nazi Germany.[19]

IV

So far, I have summarized arguments found in previous appreciations of the film. But those attributes that make *Münchhausen* stand out in the eyes of spectators, critics, and historians, however, prove equally persuasive in demonstrating the film's exemplary status as an ideological artifact, arguably the most successful, durable, and therefore instructive instance of Nazi fantasy production. The four considerations which seem to mark *Münchhausen* as an *exceptional* instance in Nazi cinema nevertheless also bear witness to its *representative* status:

- We dare not forget the political function of the occasion *Münchhausen* was made to celebrate, namely the 25th anniversary of Ufa. At the premiere in the Ufa-Palast am Zoo, Goebbels spoke of the spiritual power and organization of German film. Ludwig Klitzsch, General Director of Ufa, reviewed the studio's history, positioning Ufa and the film within party constellations. Ufa, claimed Klitzsch, "is the creation of a world war," brought to life in 1916 by the German government in an attempt to control the making of images in an embattled nation, harnessing "the economic, artistic, and technical aspects of film production in a single influential company under state leadership."[20] The history of Ufa, of Germany's most important and renowned studio, had begun with a blend of war and cinema, of the state and film production. Quite openly, party officials hallowed image-making in the service of a nation at war, reaffirming the key role of the movie industry in the state apparatus.

Indeed, *Münchhausen* blatantly inscribes striking similarities between the machinery of cinema and the machinery of war, instruments that both see and shoot like Christian's gun with its 200-kilometer range, at once a lens and a weapon. The duel between Münchhausen and Count Potemkin in a darkened chamber literalizes the analogy between the shooting of guns and cameras; pistol fire lights up the action, allowing the spectacle to become visible. The famous image of Hans Albers clinging to a cannonball flying through the sky provides the film's ultimate icon and emblem, essentializing a connection between cinema's power over human imaginations and war's tools of aggression.[21] National Socialism recognized that war involved both material territories and immaterial fields of perception. Film becomes a weapon, an explosive arsenal of surprises and effects which makes minds reel and emotions surrender under a constant barrage of stimulation. It is no coincidence that color production expanded during World War II and that the ultimate German war films, *Münchhausen* and *Kolberg,* appeared in Agfacolor.[22]

The enlistment of an oppositional writer for the production, likewise, served the purposes of the state-sponsored spectacle. A film choreographed by quite serious gamesmen, indeed consummate cynics, *Münchhausen* came from a society so lacking in alternative forms of experience that its government could allow itself the luxury of ironizing its own legitimations. The acerbic asides in Erich Kästner's script provided the semblance of an oppositional voice, a calculated function in a larger design. Kästner, of course, was a writer quite aware of cynicism; his novel, *Fabian* (1931), constitutes a bitter exploration of deception, treachery, and fraud as

central elements in the public life of modernity.[23] The unemployed protagonist traverses the phantasmatic possibilities of late Weimar Berlin, finding succor only with a friend (who commits suicide) and a lover (who leaves him for a movie career). The novel contains a conspicuous amount of male anxiety, especially in nocturnal scenes where the unwitting Fabian finds himself pursued by sexually voracious women.[24]

Münchhausen collects portraits of his sexual conquests in a private gallery. Yet for all his macho posing, his officers' casino bluster, he proves to be a much tamer sort (like Fabian), who eschews promiscuous women and eludes their advances—the film's very point of departure. Someone who suffered under the Nazis and remained steady in his status as an oppositional writer, Kästner fashioned a script that may well have been what the Doctor (Goebbels) ordered, one that showed, in any case, how male fantasies do not necessarily break down along party lines.

▪ A self-reflexive film as the centerpiece for a sumptuous extravaganza, *Münchhausen* begins with the animated wink of a painted figure, a moment of jocularity and good cheer. A salon portrait takes on independent life: the baron looks at the viewer and with his gesture extends an invitation to a play of artifice. The game, in actuality, proves to be a compelling display of power, of a narrator's talent to fascinate, excite, and control, of the medium's ability to deceive and seduce. The opening shot gives way to onscreen spectators captivated by Münchhausen's presence, enthralled by his person, and overwhelmed by his gaze, a look aware of its sovereignty and dominion. In this sense, *Münchhausen* foregrounds its own operations, intimating that the spectator participates in a harmless game and beholds a charming amusement—a strategy obscuring the possibility that the exchange is perhaps not so straightforward or innocent. Just as Münchhausen exercises ultimate mastery in (almost) every situation, so too has the film bearing his name maintained an overwhelming grip on audiences from 1943 to the present.

Central to Nazi film's rhetoric are a disavowal of one's true motives and an attendant attribution of mercenary designs and malevolent behavior to clearly marked negative figures. Münchhausen comes upon another character who uses fantasy and illusion to control people, namely the power-hungry magician, Cagliostro (played by Ferdinand Marian, an actor well known to audiences for his portrayal of Jew Süss),[25] a man, in the baron's initial description, "who lends fools his daydreams, but at a usurious interest." Both the *mise en scène* and dialogue seek to draw lines between the two figures. Münchhausen articulates their basic difference: "We'll never agree in one regard—the main regard! You want to rule, I want to live. Adventure, foreign lands, beautiful women—I need all these things. But you misuse them!" The pronouncement moved a West German critic to speak in astonishment of how the script, written at a time of Nazi expansionism, could nonetheless "propagate the peaceful individualistic adventurism of a man who only wants to visit foreign countries to conquer their women."[26]

But Münchhausen only initially denigrates Cagliostro as an abuser of power, scolding his adversary for wanting to "rule" rather than to "live." This distinction between the illusionist's sinister machinations and the Baron's playful exploits will break down in their second meeting, when an inherent affinity becomes apparent and Münchhausen indeed will draw on Cagliostro's dreams. Both figures in fact share the same desire to rule their lives and to escape foreign determination. Münchhausen, with a little help from his enemy-turned-ally, will create himself and his own destiny as a fantasy of control, a dominion he will gain through recourse to magic and a male bond, a power over temporality and history.

▪ The sexual innuendoes and carnal explicitness of *Münchhausen* have prompted many critics to laud the film for its atypical and therefore transgressive display of eroticism. The free license here remains bound to a less permissive framework, however, for the ultimate effect of the baron's narrative is that of a moral instruction. At the end of the story, the once capricious ingenue is frightened, chastened, and edified. She turns to her previously forsaken and nearly betrayed fiancé and asks that he take her home. The entire narrative, in essence, tames a shrew and trains a patriarch, foreshortening illicit sexuality and empowering an uncertain suitor to take his cue from the voice of experience—which indeed echoes Münchhausen's first words in the film, ones addressed to the young

man: "Emulate my shining example."

The narrative has a purpose as an object lesson presented by someone with a luminous gaze. And yet, how do we explain the phallic presence of Catharine in this light, the remarkable power she exercises over Münchhausen, making him bow and descend if she so wills, to disappear at her command? After his encounter with the formidable monarch, the baron, with only the most tenuous overt motivation, will seek out his former adversary, Cagliostro, and the two will exchange favors. Münchhausen's fondest wish will find an answer—and Catherine will never be seen again.

In Cagliostro's laboratory, the two illusionists collaborate, at one point even making music together. The baron saves his comrade from imminent arrest; Cagliostro, in return, provides an antidote for the trauma the baron has suffered in Catherine's court. (The magician "treats" Münchhausen's wounded appendage, an arm shot in a duel.) Staring into each other's eyes, the two recognize their affinity and find an essential point of concord. The new brothers in spirit scrutinize a painting of a nude woman posed with her back to the beholder, one of the genre, comments Kästner's script, "which makes us curious about the view from the front."[27] With a quick gesture, Cagliostro animates the female image, which turns around to face the two spectators. Münchhausen, amused by his host's sleight of hand, remarks that he prefers the naked back to the point blank stare and exposed bosom, a sentiment shared by the master of special effects, who returns the image to its formerly unanimated and apparently less objectionable state. The magician proceeds to offer the baron

The baron and his servant Christian on the moon, a realm with different laws of time

a ring that renders its bearer invisible for an hour as well as to grant his guest the gift of eternal youth. Münchhausen thereby gains the powers of lasting presence and sudden absence; quite literally he takes on the magical capacity of film, acquiring enduring life as moving image.[28] This control over his own image, as the scene makes clear, remains inextricably bound to a control over the image of women, the ability to determine how they figure in his own life's fantasy.

The collective production of a male bond in a laboratory of special devices and elaborate apparatuses affords a glimpse at the double wish behind *Münchhausen,* the desire to manipulate one's destiny and its means of production as well as to master those forces that—like Catherine—might undermine or indeed sabotage it. Cagliostro's magic is potent: every woman we subsequently encounter is, like the nude figure in the painting, a contained and/or confined one; likewise, female presence becomes increasingly marked by a lack of sexuality. We partake of a sultan's seraglio, a collection of lovers redolent of the baron's private gallery. And we come to the moon, where women no longer have a part in reproduction, where female minds and bodies remain separated and at the constant disposal of their spouses, a poignant fantasy resolution to matters of sexual difference.[29]

- Finally, critics have valorized *Münchhausen* as a rare instance of a Nazi film of the fantastic, a work with an unbound episodic structure, a free-flowing narrative that in decisive ways runs against official ideology. As we have seen, this is not quite the case. The work demonstrates a consequential logic and serves a moral purpose, ending a domestic conflict by scaring a woman into submission, prompting her to beg her future husband to take her home. The narrative frame confronts and exorcizes female eroticism, just as the baron's own scenario overcomes the threat of a phallic woman and surveys a gallery of female miniatures, a collection of contained women. The ultimate extension of this defensive sensibility involves the woman on the moon, whose divided self defers to her husband's authority and will. This arrangement pleases Münchhausen and he lauds its practicality: "That would be something for our housewives." The scene on the moon indeed has some bearing on the domestic economy of Nazi Germany; it is both

a bad joke and a serious wish.[30] Male dominion in the Third Reich meant female servitude; the desired control over every sector of reality bespoke an abiding fear of woman as the ultimate marker of difference, a signifier for potentially disruptive and chaotic energies, for untamed nature itself.[31] *Münchhausen* hallows a protagonist who controls his own image and story as well as commanding the images and actions of the women in his life.

In the final sequence, the baron will sacrifice his immortality, deciding to live out his final days with his wife. He proclaims a conclusion to his own narrative in an expressive blend of kitsch and death, blowing out a candle flame that segues into letters of smoke spelling "the end."[32] His wink opens the film; his final breath brings closure. Self-conscious gestures initiate the opening and closing move of this game, a play choreographed, however, by sometimes uncertain *metteurs en scène.* Does Münchhausen, for all his bravado, really desire sensual abandon in the arms of beautiful women? The most erotically charged encounter remains the baron's interlude with Cagliostro. The sole moment of extended emotion takes place over the dying body of his constant companion, Christian. The woman Münchhausen ultimately joins is more a mother than a wife, someone much older who understands and indulges him. The end of the film, in short, takes leave from the foreign and the fantastic, retreating to a domestic sphere and maternal sanctuary, reenacting the trajectory of Weimar "street films," those narratives about fearful male subjects who learn to dread the outside world and renounce erotic adventure.

V

Münchhausen is both an exceptional German film and a representative Nazi entertainment, at once self-reflexive and self-exposing, an embodiment of manifest and latent energies at work in the Third Reich. It is a film fashioned by cynics (in this sense Goebbels and Kästner were hardly amicable but not utterly incompatible collaborators), whose hero is an expert dissimulator—indeed, one might call him Nazi cinema incarnate. The baron's wink is a mischievous jest and a self-reflexive gesture as well as an enabling act for the film's subsequent

Carnival and contained women: Münchhausen in Venice

feats of duplicity.[33] *Münchhausen* is a consummate instance of institutionalized deception and calculated illusion-making; it worked arm in arm with earnest and apodictic official rhetoric, exemplifying a division of labor between light touches and heavy hands.

Most observers see the film in a much different and less problematic light. For them, *Münchhausen* is a remarkable exception, an oppositional production, a work made during the Third Reich that is decidedly not a Nazi film. Released and swiftly rehabilitated after 1945 in chopped-up versions, *Münchhausen* and its missing footage took on a legendary status. The work so fascinated David Stewart Hull that it became the impetus for his book on the films of the Third Reich.[34] The reconstruction of the color film in 1978 finally restored the film to its previous glory as an important cultural icon. It would be foolish to deny—or underestimate—the fascination this work has exercised over audiences both during and after World War II.

Like many popular films made during the Third Reich, albeit more elaborate and successful, *Münchhausen* is both playful and serious, direct and elusive, cheerful and disturbing. No other example from the era, though, so acutely demonstrates how aesthetics and entertainment interacted with the politics and pathology of a totalitarian regime. What is interesting about *Münchhausen*—and this holds for Nazi cinema in general—are the limits of its self-knowledge, the moments where cynical refinement elicits a troubled subjectivity. *Münchhausen* enacts a male fantasy of control and like-

War and cinema, a Nazi strange love: the baron rides the bomb

wise exhibits the fearful psyche that needs and produces this fantasy; it celebrates the triumph of male will while intimating the travail of male anxiety. An ideological product dressed up as a scintillating diversion, *Münchhausen* represents the sophisticated creation of a state apparatus, modern fantasy ware implemented in the wider frameworks of public persuasion and world war.

The images and fantasies produced under National Socialism are still very much with us today, enjoying wide circulation and a continuing presence, in cinemas, at film festivals, on television in both Germanies, in film and video distribution outlets, in university and college classrooms. They have much to relate about Nazi Germany, particularly if we remain sensitive to their complex mix of official designs and subterranean desires, to their simultaneous operations as pleasure machines, ideological artifacts, and symptomatic texts.

Notes

1. A subtitled 16mm print of *Münchhausen* is available in the United States from West Glen Films, 1430 Broadway, New York, NY 10018. Video cassette versions can also be purchased from various sources.
2. See the comments by Otto Heinz Jahn, Production Chief of Ufa, in "Das Programm der Ufa-Filmkunst," *Der deutsche Film 1942/43* (yearbook): 68.
3. I. B., "Pomp und Prunk entstand auf Pump," *Abend* 22 June 1978.
4. For a survey in English of Münchhausen texts throughout Europe, see John Carswell's introduction to *The Singular Adventures of Baron Münchhausen by Rudolph Raspe and others,* ed. John Carswell (New York: Heritage, 1952) ix–xxxviii.
5. The premiere version ran 133 minutes and was cut back to 118 minutes by June 17. The copies released in West Germany during the early fifties (shorn of the framing passages and much else) had a length of about 90 minutes. See Gunter Groll's review in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 19 July 1954. The 1978 reconstruction, undertaken by the Murnau-Stiftung in Wiesbaden, restored missing footage and the original tones of the Agfacolor. The film was screened, with great success, at the Cannes Festival in May 1978, opening shortly thereafter, likewise to accolades, in German cinemas. *Münchhausen* appears frequently today in special screenings throughout West Germany and West Berlin.
6. Originally, plans had called for Josef Winckler's novel, *Der tolle Bamberg,* to serve as the source for the gala-film. Erich Kästner apparently suggested *Münchhausen* for the event. See Ingo Tornow, *Erich Kästner und der Film* (Munich: Filmland Presse, 1989) 18. The actors Werner Krauss and Eugen Klöpfer wrote *Münchhausens Abenteuer* in 1940, a comedy planned for with both stage and cinema. See Boguslaw Drewniak, *Der deutsche Film 1938–1945* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1987) 672.
7. For a consideration of Kästner's work in the film industry of the Third Reich, see Tornow 17–24; also, Dieter Mank, *Erich Kästner im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1981). The initial verbal offer to Kästner from Ufa was never put to paper. Kästner's pseudonym, much to the writer's chagrin, was deleted at Goebbels's behest from the original credits of the film. See Helga Bemman, *Humor auf Taille: Erich Kästner—Leben und Werk* (Berlin/GDR: Verlag der Nation, 1983) 351ff.
8. As quoted in David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 45.
9. Cf. Harald Juhnke's boulevard press tribute, " 'Der kam, sah die Mieze—schon war es passiert,' " *Bild am Sonntag,* 13 July 1978: "Hans Albers died twenty years ago. No one has forgotten him. The fascination he exercised over women was singular."
10. Our first glimpse of her comes along with an otherwise unmotivated image of a caged man, a rebellious soldier imprisoned by Catherine for leading a mutiny of Cossacks who refuse to shave their beards. We also hear a

rumor that the czarina has had her husband murdered. In this way, she is introduced in the narrative via fearful conjectures about her castrating powers.

11. "Visual Pleasure Inhibited: Aspects of the German Revue Film," trans. J. D. Steakley and Gabriele Hoover, *New German Critique* 24–25 (Fall/Winter 1981–82): 244.
12. Wilfried Wiegand, "Die Wahrheit des Scheins: Der *Münchhausen*-Film des Jahres 1943 wird wieder aufgeführt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* 5 July 1978.
13. Organizers of a special retrospective at the Berlin Film Festival in 1977 only identified twelve films of the fantastic made in Germany between 1933 and 1945. See Kraft Wetzel and Peter Hagemann, *Liebe, Tod und Technik: Kino des Phantastischen 1933–1945* (West Berlin: Spiess, 1977).
14. Particularly poignant examples of these general dynamics include *The Prodigal Son (Der verlorene Sohn,* 1934), *La Habanera* (1937), *Friedemann Bach* (1941), and *Andreas Schlüter* (1942).
15. *Film-Kurier* published a series of articles debating the relation between fantasy and reality in film during May 1942, exchanges that paralleled regular reports on the progress of the *Münchhausen* production. See also Fritz Theodor Fabius, "Phantasie und Wirklichkeit: Anmerkungen anlässlich einer Unterhaltung mit dem Spielleiter Joseph von Baky," *Film-Kurier,* 3 March 1944.
16. Contemporary commentators in the Third Reich speak of the genre in terms of peril and challenge, stressing the necessity of not letting the irreal get out of hand so as to lose track of narrative logic. The fantastic demands a creative individual who can find the formal means to harness its inordinate potential. See Hans-Hubert Gensert, "Dämonie und Phantastik im Film," *Film-Kurier,* 22 May 1942.
17. Cf. *Liebe, Tod und Technik* 42.
18. See Hannah Arendt's general comments on how totalitarian leaders create convincing alternative worlds, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* 2nd enlarged ed. (New York/Cleveland: World, 1958) 362.
19. See Frederick W. Ott, *The Great German Films* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1986) 217–218: "Von Baky and his technical staff studied the special effects of numerous color productions, including Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938) and David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind* (1939), but particular attention was given to Alexander Korda's 1940 film, *The Thief of Bagdad,* which Goebbels much admired and hoped to surpass in special effects and color artistry." See above all David Steward Hull, *Film in the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 252–260. Hull's account of production details has dominated most of the subsequent literature on *Münchhausen,* from newspaper criticism to film historiography, even finding its way into the Neue Constantin Film press booklet of 1978.
20. As quoted in Joseph Wulf, *Theater und Film im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt am Main/West Berlin/Vienna: Ullstein, 1983) 356.
21. Cf. Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception,* trans. Patrick Camiller (London/New York: Verso, 1989) 7–8: ". . . War consists not so much in scoring territorial, economic or other material victories as in appropriating the 'immateriality' of perceptual fields. . . . Once the cinema was able to create surprise (technological, psychological, etc.), it effectively came under the category of weapons."
22. Cf. Virilio 8.
23. See Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason,* trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 477–479.
24. Cf. Marianne Bäumler's feminist critique of *Fabian* in her book, *Die aufgeräumte Wirklichkeit des Erich Kästner* (Cologne: Prometh, 1984) 108–130.
25. See Helma Sanders-Brahms, "*Münchhausen* oder Lügen haben lange Beine," *epd Kirche und Film* 31 (August 1978): 14, where the author aptly describes Marian as "the most brilliant malevolent presence" *(Brunnenvergifter)* in Nazi cinema.
26. Wiegand, "Die Wahrheit des Scheins."
27. Erich Kästner, *Gesammelte Schriften,* volume 4 (Zürich: Atrium, 1957) 377.
28. Another renowned Ufa hero, Siegfried of Fritz Lang's 1924 spectacle, possesses a related (albeit more circumscribed) combination of powers. Similarly, Münchhausen's transformation via a special effect from Oriental dress to Western costume recalls the dissolve that marks the protagonist's change of persona in Harlan's *Jew Süss.*
29. Cf. Francis Courtade and Pierre Cadars, *Geschichte des Films im Dritten Reich,* trans. Florian Hopf (Munich/Vienna: Hanser, 1975) 275. In an otherwise enthusiastic and appreciative account of the film (one that relies heavily on Hull), the authors note how this exotic topography recalls "the disquieting phantasmagorias" of Odilon Redon. Cf. as well Alice Yaeger Kaplan's discussion of F. T. Marinetti's *Mafarka le Futuriste* (1909) and *Les Mots en liberté futuristes,* in *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 87: ". . . As man 'humanizes' nature, he reinvents it in a form he can control. Yet only the distance permitted by modern technology allows this foreshortened perspective. . . . Technology gives to man the impression of having created nature, but also of having killed it. This is where misogyny comes in."
30. Karsten Witte, "Das Braun von Agfacolor: Hans Albers als *Münchhausen,*" *Frankfurter Rundschau,* 4 July 1978.
31. Cf. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies. Volume 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History,* trans. Stephen Conway et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 215n.: " . . . 'Women' is a code word for the whole complex of nature, for anything at all having to do with 'feelings' and the unconscious."
32. Cf. Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death,* trans. Thomas Weyr (New York: Harper & Row, 1984) 27.
33. Cf. Sloterdijk 146.
34. Hull, p. ix: "This study of the Nazi-era film originated sometime in late 1959 when James Card, curator of motion pictures at the George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, showed me a print of *Münchhausen.* I was intrigued with the film, and wanted to find some more information about it and about a film industry which, in the middle of a terrible war, could produce such an epic."

Gösta Werner

Fritz Lang and Goebbels

Myth and Facts

Myths are born and grow and flourish. Those who unthinkingly pass them on end up believing that they are facts. Repetition creates a cloak of seeming veracity which confuses gullible minds so that they cannot detect the truth underneath.

Thus every knowledgeable member of the film trade believes in the story of film director Fritz Lang's precipitate flight from Germany following on the banning of his film *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse.* The story goes that Dr. Goebbels, who was responsible for the banning, offered Lang the post of managing director of the entire German film industry. He stuck to his offer, maintains Lang himself, even after being told by Lang that he was a Jew—in actual fact Lang was half Jewish, his mother being Jewish. The story then goes on to say that Lang was given 24 hours to reconsider Goebbels's generous offer. Before nightfall Lang fled Berlin for Paris. He did this so precipitously that he did not even have time to draw money from the bank—banks closed in those days in Germany at half-past two.

But is this the true story? Thanks to material recently made available by the *Deutsche-Kinemathek* in Berlin—which placed it at the disposal of the German Film Museum *(Deutsches Filmmuseum)* in Frankfurt and its young and very able program

Fritz Lang—unknown date, but probably when he was still in Berlin

director Ronny Loewe—we are now able to discover the facts. These are as follows.

The Nazi seizure of power occurred on 30 January 1933. For some time traditional German censorship continued without a break as if nothing had happened. It was not until six weeks later, on 14 March, that the *Ministerium für Volkserklärung und Propaganda* was set up, with Dr. Joseph Goebbels as its head. At that time the *Testament des Dr. Mabuse* was not quite completed, so the film had not been submitted to the censors.

No one expected the film to be banned, however, and on 21 March the official film journal *Der Kinematograph* was able to report that the première was to be on Friday 24 March at the large picture palace called *Ufa-Palast am Zoo.* Two days later, i.e., 23 March, *Der Kinematograph* informed its readers that the première had had to be put off as the film only that same day would reach the censors. The day after, 24 March, the same journal wrote that the postponement of the première had been due to "technical reasons."

Nothing further was revealed about the film until not quite one week later. On 30 March *Der Kinematograph* announced that the German Board of Film Censors had banned the film on the preceding day. The decision had been reached at a meeting of the Board, "under the chairmanship of Counsellor Zimmerman." The reason given was that it constituted a threat to law and order and public safety—in accordance with a regulation to be found in the Law of Censorship.

The film was passed, however, for distribution abroad—there was both a German and a French version. The German version was first shown in Vienna on 12 May 1933, but the French version had had its première a month earlier in Paris. The cutter of the film, Lothar Wolff, had even earlier taken the French-speaking material to Paris during the final stages of the making of the film and had completed the editing of the French version there. This gives the lie to the story that appears from time to time about the negative of the film having been smuggled to France in suitcases filled with dirty linen.

The film had also been sold to a number of European countries (besides Austria and France). Among them was Sweden, where, however, on 26 April 1933, the German version of the film was banned by the Swedish Board of Film Censors in accordance with paragraph six of the Royal Ordinance for Cinema Productions, the paragraph against the depicting of violence on the screen.

In Germany the last week of March 1933 turned out to be an eventful and momentous one for the German film industry. Goebbels had lost no time in preparing a large-scale drive to "renew" German film production as a whole. On March 28th, the day before the banning of the *Testament des Dr. Mabuse,* Goebbels had invited in the entire

Fritz Lang, near the end of his life, at the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley

top personnel of the German film industry to a *Bierabend* in the Hotel Kaiserhof. Among those present were producers, directors, and technical staff. Certain reports have it that Fritz Lang was among those present.

It was in the course of this private party that Goebbels expressed his admiration for four films: he said they had made an indelible impression on him. The four were Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin,* the American *Anna Karenina* (with Greta Garbo in the lead), Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen,* and Luis Trenker's *Der Rebell.* The last-mentioned film, whose motif is the struggle for freedom of the Tyrolese, had been released in Berlin two months earlier and was still being shown. Goebbels professed his admiration for Eisenstein's film for the power with which a political idea permeated the film. This, he thought, should set an example for the new, ideologically conscious and politically engaged film that he expected from all German producers, directors and manuscript writers—though of course the political overtones would have to be different!

A Goebbels favorite: *Anna Karenina*

It is very likely that Lang was present at this party. He was known to be a fierce nationalist and had at this time no intention of leaving Germany. The day before, 27 March, he had taken part in the founding of the "direction group" of the NSBO (= *Die Nationalsozialistische Betriebsorganisation*). Three other major film figures were also involved: Carl Boese, an experienced and highly successful director of comedies; Viktor Jansen, a young director of comedies for whom Billy Wilder had written a number of scripts; and Trenker, an actor and director reknowned for his dramatic "mountain pictures" with strongly nationalistic undertones.

Thus Lang can hardly have been surprised when, one day in April, shortly after the Kaiserhof party, he was summoned by Goebbels and offered the leadership of the entire German film production—instead of being only one of the four placed at the helm of the NSBO. It was not just a highly attractive offer. It was a logical as well.

It was at this point, according to the story, that Fritz Lang, penniless and with Goebbels's offer ringing in his ears, fled headlong to Paris, only to return to Berlin and the Fatherland after the end of World War II.

Which parts of this story are facts and which are the "story"?

(A) The contact between Goebbels and Fritz Lang: Even though it is highly probable that Goebbels *did* offer Lang the post as head of the entire German film production, there is not a word about it in Goebbels's usually meticulous diary for the year 1933. Lang is not mentioned there at all.

(B) Lang's headlong flight to Paris:
The answer is to be found in Lang's passport. The passport, numbered 66 11 53.31, was issued in Berlin on 11 September 1931, and valid until 11 September 1936. It contains a large number of stamps and Fritz Lang's name is to be found alongside nearly every one of them. There are no visas or exit stamps for the months of February, March, and the beginning of April 1933. There is only one exit visa for Fritz Lang. It is made out by *Der Polizeipräsident in Berlin* and dated 23 June 1933. It is valid for exits for a period of six months. Up to that date Lang had therefore never left Germany.

The passport also contains several visas for entry into Belgium, every one issued in Berlin and at the end of June and July 1933. Further, during the same period Lang purchased foreign currency repeatedly at the *Weltreisebureau*

Union in Unter den Linden in Berlin, totalling 1,366 *Reichsmark*. All these transactions are duly registered in the passport in dated stamps: 26 June, 27 June, 20 July. These days Lang must have been in Berlin.

According to the testimony of entry and exit stamps, in June and in July 1933 Lang visited England and Belgium, inter alia by air. He had a two-year visa for repeated entries into France. It was issued in London 20 June 1932 and was valid until 20 June 1934. The entry stamps for 1933 are all from June and July 1933, the first being dated 28 June, the last 31 July.

The foreign currency stamps from Berlin testify, as do the various entry and exit stamps, that between the journeys abroad in the summer of 1933 Lang returned to Berlin, which city he left finally only on 31 July 1933—four months after his legendary meeting with Goebbels and supposed dramatic escape.

Dr. Goebbels did not forget Lang and his films. When in October 1933 he celebrated his thirty-sixth birthday in his new and elegant official residence in Berlin he entertained himself and his guests in the evening by showing them the banned *Testament des Dr. Mabuse*. Lang, meanwhile, was in France, where he was shortly to begin filming *Liliom*.

Sources

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Goebbels's speech in Kaiserhof 28 March 1933: given *in extenso* in Albrecht, pp. 439 ff.

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For embellishments: Lotte Eisner, in *Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland* (1984) relates how Lang was wont to tell with great delight about his conversation with Goebbels and how "each time he embellished it a little more." (pp. 127-28)

Reviews

Drugstore Cowboy

Director: Gus van Sant. Script: Van Sant and Daniel Yost, from a novel by James Fogle. Photography: Robert Yeoman. Editor: Curtiss Clayton. Music. Elliott Goldenthal. Avenue Pictures.

The astonishingly lyrical and quick-witted *Drugstore Cowboy* is set in Portland, Oregon, in 1971, and every movie it reminded me of comes from the sixties and early seventies—*Bonnie and Clyde,* Godard's *Band of Outsiders, Mean Streets, M*A*S*H,* and the long-forgotten Ivan Passer film *Born to Win.* In *Born to Win,* George Segal played the first legitimate junkie hipster in the movies, a man who had to shoot up because being straight was too boring, and in *Drugstore Cowboy* Bob (Matt Dillon), chief of a quartet of low-grade desperadoes who rob drugstores and filch pills and Dilaudid from hospitals, explains that staying high releases the pressures of the everyday—like tying your shoes. Bob and his band—his wife Dianne (Kelly Lynch), soft-spoken, rabbitty Rick (James Le Gros) and his novice girl friend Nadine (Heather Graham)—are rebels against respectability. They're not much different from thousands of enclaves of young people of the same era, who sat around getting stoned and laughing at anti-dope ads on TV—the lame propaganda of the straight world—except they use pharmaceuticals instead of grass and hallucinogens, and that's *all* they do; scoring and staying ripped form the wobbly arc of their lives. And director Gus Van Sant, whose style is rambunctious and playfully experimental and ragtaggle-poetic, keeps up with them by creating a leapfrogging rhythm out of odd, slanted angles and quick cuts, and a skewed vision of the world out of his unpredictable, often magical focus on unexpected objects (or ordinary objects seen in extraordinary ways). When Bob boils water for tea in a little tin pot in his room, Van Sant's camera practically dives into the bubbles (like Godard zeroing in on the cup of

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coffee in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*); when Bob switches on a light, Van Sant gets in close enough that we can read the wattage on the bulb. And there are free-form sequences where the implements of Bob's lifestyle—capsules, spoons, matches—as well as tiny trees and at one point a blue gun float by like the uprooted bits of Dorothy's farm during the cyclone in *The Wizard of Oz.* They're the disconnected shreds of Bob's consciousness; Van Sant allows us to see the world as he figures a junkie must see it.

A painter with a film degree from the Rhode Island School of Design, Van Sant has a gift for this kind of lopsided allusiveness and home-grown collage surrealism. He also has a gift for conveying outsiders' perspectives. His previous movie, *Mala Noche,* based on a short story by Walt Curtis, was shot (also in Portland) in black and white and 16 millimeter, and though it has a perfectly linear narrative, everything in it seems to be communicated indirectly, by feeling. The hero, Walt (played by the wonderfully expressive Oregonian actor Tim Streeter), is a young man, working in a convenience store, who falls in love with a Mexican teenager, Johnny (Doug Cooeyote), an illegal alien, and subjects himself to a protracted—and futile—series of games and humiliations to earn his affection. In place of his love object, who first refuses his advances and then disappears, Walt sleeps with Johnny's friend, Pepper (Ray Monge), who later gets shot by cops during a drug deal. The movie is about the follies of passion; plaintive and deeply impassioned itself, it takes the point of view that these can't be explained and don't need to be defended. Walt allows himself to be left on the outside of Johnny's and Pepper's camaraderie—to be the gringo they can take their frustrations with white society out on. He's smart enough to know that when Pepper has sex with him, his aggressiveness is meant to victimize Walt, and he's sane enough to resent it—but he's also strung out on his own homosexual romanticism, and he keeps exposing himself. When he wrestles with Pepper and gets on top of him, Streeter's Walt looks ravaged, melted down by his desire for the boy, and there's desperation behind the good-buddy grin he flashes at Johnny on the street when he invites him to come by the store for a visit. Lacerated Walt is the most nakedly emotional gay character in a movie since

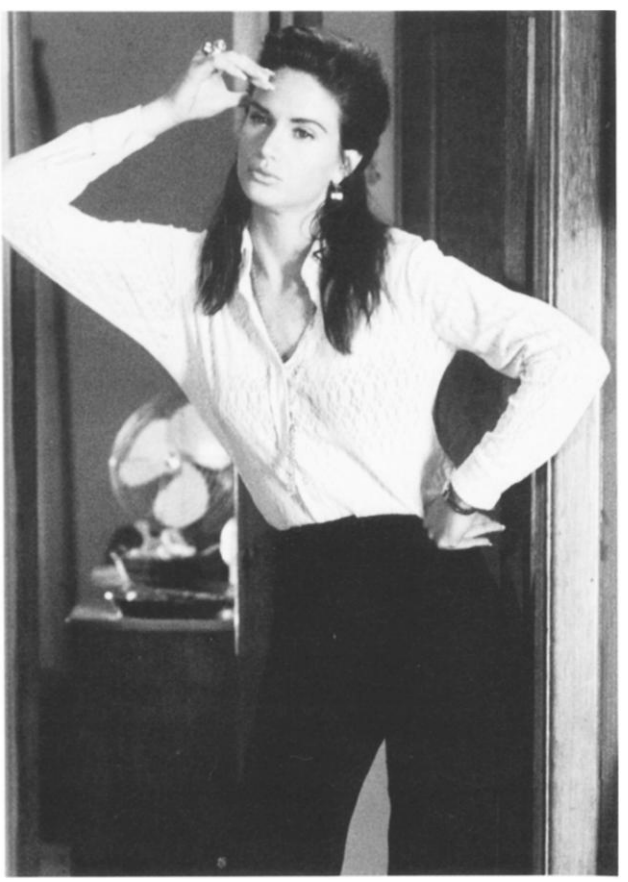
Mala Noche

the runaway Lilica in *Pixote,* and *Mala Noche,* with its manic-depressive tone and its mysterious ashcan lyricism (Pepper's shooting is like a classic *film noir* scene that's been split apart—it's shot like a pointillist photograph), seems to ride on his brain waves.

Working on a budget of $7 million in *Drugstore Cowboy*—many times what it cost him to bring in *Mala Noche* (which was his second independent feature)—Van Sant manages to sacrifice remarkably little of the looseness, the adventurousness, the improvisatory feel of the earlier picture; he still has a knack for taking us into corners we've never come across before. And his actors seem to trust him completely, as Tim Streeter must have in *Mala Noche.* Matt Dillon gives his best performance as Bob, whose peculiar gift as a put-on artist is that, on some level, he's always telling the truth—he's straight and bent at the same time. He and Dianne unsettle Nadine with a rap about the super-

stitions that govern their lives, several of which they claim she's stepped right into; it's hilarious—a blitzed Nichols and May routine—but when the motel that Bob's gang is holed up in turns out to be housing a cops' convention, Bob blames the hex he says Nadine's inadvertently put on them, and he's dead serious. Dillon's grown smarter and surer and a lot more skillful as an actor, but I think it's his on-camera instinct—the quality that made him a star when he was a teenager—that makes him the perfect actor for Van Sant; I doubt the director could have connected with a more technical actor in quite this way, or gotten him to skate on his mood shifts as Dillon does here. This is Altman-caliber acting, where the performer manages to pick up the *feeling* of a film—which is semisubmerged in the script but evident in the camera movement, the photography (by Robert Yeoman, in this case) and the editing (Curtiss Clayton)—the way a vocalist can catch on to the subtleties of a jazz combo.

Kelly Lynch in *Drugstore Cowboy*



Tall, aristocratic Kelly Lynch, who was a sour, leggy blank in *Cocktail* and *Roadhouse,* riffs superbly with Dillon, especially in a wonderful serio-comic gag where she tries to get him into bed but he's more turned on by making another score. Lynch's Dianne has a tough, swinging presence, but she's lost underneath it; when Bob, fed up with the turn his luck has taken, decides to enroll in a methadone program, she feels betrayed—she wants him to explain how he can consider taking such an alternative when he knows she *can't.* Lynch has worked out her performance fully in physical terms —when she leaves him for the last time, the way she bops down the corridor of his apartment building, slightly disconnected from her surroundings, is touching, pathetic.

Bob isn't always likeable; when Nadine OD's on Dilaudid (shooting up more than she can handle is a gesture of rebellion against the oddly parental authority Bob and Dianne exert on her and Rick), his response is callous and self-absorbed. And one of his pranks almost gets a cop killed. Van Sant isn't interested in dividing up his characters so we'll know which ones we're supposed to like; the officer on Bob's case, Gentry (James Remar), is capable of both brutality (provoked by the injury to his partner, he beats Bob up) and generosity (when Bob resurfaces in Portland, in the methadone program, Gentry warns him that he might be in danger). What Van Sant looks for in his characters are surprises, the unanticipated twists that people are always capable of—the ones that throw us and then lead us to uncover unsuspected areas of those we thought we knew: Bob's capacity for lonely contemplation, Dianne's blurry vulnerability, Nadine's bravado, Rick's tenderness.

The entire cast is excellent—Le Gros and Graham, James Remar (cast against type), Grace Zabriskie as Bob's mother, Max Perlich as a druggy teen (a Michael J. Pollard type) who's a lot creepier than he seems at first, William S. Burroughs, with his weird, distended drawl and his hawk face, in an uncategorizable cameo as a junkie priest. Burroughs isn't really an actor, but he has a mesmerizing presence, and he stirs our associations with him as the literary junkie gospel—you can't help wondering if he wrote his own lines. Van Sant mixes his tones with a painter's confidence, setting up the big transition, two-thirds of the way through, from

anarchic comedy (in the *Bonnie and Clyde*-ish robbery scenes and the scenes involving the gang relaxing) to bluesy low gear (once Bob makes up his mind—with no feeling of triumph or joy or even simple satisfaction—to give up dope). The scene that prepares us for where the movie's going is Bob and Dianne's visit to his mother, a diminutive, apple-cheeked woman in a bouffant and high heels, who, screaming that Bob's a dope fiend and Dianne's a nymphomaniac, refuses to open the door until she's hidden her valuables. It's a wild sketch with a core of melancholy that kicks in a moment or two before Van Sant passes on to something else—and in that moment you get a glimpse of what's underneath the movie's wayward knockabout humor. In a way, the end of this scene, seeping into our consciousness, is like the opening shot of the Mexican kids traveling in boxcars in *Mala Noche*— Van Sant never returns to it, but its mood haunts the film. Alienation's a great deal funnier in *Drugstore Cowboy* than it is in *Mala Noche,* but both movies come from the same impulse: to find a style appropriate to characterizing the lifestyles of people who are closed out—of close themselves out—from the mainstream. The downshift in *Drugstore Cowboy* is Van Sant's way of keeping faith with that impulse. STEVE VINEBERG

The Bear

Director: Jean-Jacques Annaud. Script: Gerard Brach. Photography: Philippe Rousselot. Editor: Noëlle Boisson. Music: Philippe Sarde. Producer: Pierre Grünstein. Tristar/Columbia.

Jean-Jacques Annaud has been both praised and criticized in recent years for his attempts to film massive, unwieldy, and what some have even considered "unfilmable" stories by resorting to conventionalized narrative frameworks. In *Quest for Fire* (1981) and *The Name of the Rose* (1986) he eschewed "epic" pretensions for the drama of one or two characters in pursuit of a single (and deceptively simple) goal. In each case the thing sought, the secret which promised to bring light—literal as well as symbolic—to an age of relative darkness was, at bottom, knowledge itself.

It might be tempting to try to fit Annaud's most recent film, *The Bear,* into just this sort of basic *auteurist* framework. In it, an innocent young cub is introduced to the mysterious ways of life by a wise, older bear, while a hunter who stalks them learns the life-affirming value of allowing them to survive. Thus, the North American frontier civilization, virtually built on the trapping and slaughter of animals (not to mention genocide), gives way to a new age of enlightened, peaceful co-existence. As in the earlier films then, we see one of history's small pivot-points of change and progress, a quiet chapter in the story of humanity's advancement.

Yet, forcing interpretations of this film to conform to the context of Annaud's others, especially given the diverse range of subject matter he has taken on since *Black and White in Color* (1977), imposes severe limitations on our appreciation of *The Bear* for what it is. For despite claims, at the time of its American release, of its uniqueness and innovation, *The Bear* is very likely the most *conventional* film Annaud has ever made—his first real genre piece. Critics, however, have long tended to deny wildlife film the status of a full-fledged film genre, though it is an old and established form with a history and tradition as rich and diverse as any. The popularity of wildlife films on television has made them just the sort of thing "serious" critics have preferred to overlook or dismiss. The success of *The Bear* should indicate that the wildlife genre is creatively viable, and, more importantly, in need of a critical re-evaluation.

Annaud has shown, as other film-makers have often discovered, that working within any well-defined genre need not be a constraint on creativity, but instead can provide a familiar "ground" against which one's own work stands out all the more clearly in relief. The idea, of course, is that this figure/ground distinction works because audiences have a *tacit* familiarity with the genre's conventions, and so are likely to respond to subtle variations on familiar themes far more readily than to something truly unique and original, for which they may have no "language." Thus, much of what may seem new or original about *The Bear* stems precisely from the fact that it is, after all, old and familiar.

Though the novel on which *The Bear* is based, James Oliver Curwood's *The Grizzly King* (1916),

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Though the novel on which *The Bear* is based, James Oliver Curwood's *The Grizzly King* (1916),

Daddy bear, baby bear: Surrogate family relationships prevail over biological reality in *The Bear*

is virtually unknown today, Curwood's stories were once widely read, and a number of them were made into films both during his lifetime and after. Curwood died in 1927, but it was in the very next year that Felix Salten published his novel *Bambi.* Disney's film version of this story is, arguably, the single work that exerted the most influence on the development of the wildlife genre for decades—despite the fact that *Bambi* was an animated film.[1] Salten followed it up a few years later with *Perri,* the "biography" of a squirrel, which Disney filmed in 1956, this time as a live action feature using real, though *untrained* animals (an essential difference from Annaud's film). The film version of *Perri* was oxymoronically advertised as a "True Life *Fantasy,*" but it represented the culmination of nearly every narrative device and storytelling convention the Disney team had perfected in eight years of making their series of "True Life *Adventures.*" Though these earlier films had been widely (and wrongly) considered "documentaries," *Perri* emerged nonetheless as the quintessential Disney wildlife film, and showed how far the genre had evolved by the mid-1950s in the direction of pure storytelling. Moreover, by focusing on the lives of animal protagonists, Disney effectively projected the nuclear family structure into nature. Partly as an outcome of increasing "ecological" consciousness during the 1960s (resulting in, for example, passage of the Endangered Species Act), Disney's highly anthropomorphic model of wildlife filmmaking fell into decline after *Charlie the Lonesome Cougar* (1968). Television programs professing a more "scientific" interest in wildlife soon became the norm. Yet as recently as 1988, wildlife filmmaker Marty Stouffer has suggested that Disney's model, the one "devoted to the life story of one particular animal" remains the "classic format for wildlife films."[2] It is this context in which Annaud's *The Bear* can be best appreciated.

Though the absence of voice-over narration in *The Bear* is the most obvious departure from tradition, some have been led to deny emphatically that the film has anything in common with the classic Disney model.[3] Yet even the much talked-about dream sequence, held up as the true token of Annaud's unique and innovative determination to portray the animals' point of view, has its precedent in Disney's *Perri.* Though Perri's visually surrealistic dream occurs during winter hibernation, the one experienced by Annaud's cub is the result of eating wild mushrooms. (They appear to be the highly toxic *Amanita muscaria,* incidentally, and nobody should be tempted into eating them for hallucinogenic purposes!) Yet, even here Disney is not easily one-upped; one need only recall the episode in *Dumbo* (1941) in which the under-aged protagonist becomes accidentally intoxicated, and

hallucinates a frightening onslaught of pink elephants. One could argue that animation is another genre entirely, and that cartoons are full of animal characters whose points of view are routinely depicted; yet at the Disney studios the separation between the two types of production was never clear. Ben Sharpsteen, who directed *Dumbo,* also directed the "documentary" film *Water Birds* (1951). James Algar, a sequence director on *Bambi,* went on to direct Disney's first two feature-length "True Life Adventures," *The Living Desert* (1953) and *The Vanishing Prairie* (1954), both of which won Academy Awards for "Best Documentary Feature."

What all of this intermingling of novels, animation, and so-called "documentary" film resulted in was the development of a set of clearly codified narrative conventions which survive even today, and which unite film-makers as diverse as Stouffer and Annaud. Thus, *The Bear,* like Stouffer's *The Man Who Loved Bears* (1977), a number of Disney's films, and several others from around the world, wastes no time in making an orphan of its young protagonist. The matter of the mother's death might seem only an unfortunate accident until it is seen in the context of the entire genre, where it is typical. In some cases the use of the orphan device takes the form of a temporary separation, as in Disney's *Yellowstone Cubs* (1963) and *Flash, the Teenage Otter* (1964); in *The Bear* the death of the mother during the first reel completely eliminates the possibility of a happy reunion in the end, and so focuses attention on the drama of survival more than on frolicsome comedy.

Though seemingly unwarranted, this tragic occurrence is also necessary to set up the "incredible journey" motif which often forms the dynamic of these pictures' narratives. In *Flash,* this takes the form of a variation on the heroic quest tale: a foundling is set adrift on the waters, embarks on a perilous voyage in search of his origins, along the way undergoes ritual trials which initiate him into adulthood, and returns to otter society in triumph, where he is rewarded with a companion of the opposite sex. The same is true for *Charlie, the Lonesome Cougar,* and to some degree for *Perri,* though these two, like the cub in Annaud's film, are true orphans. In each case, an idyllic paradise is first established, then threatened or lost through the action of predators or natural cataclysms, and finally,

The Bear: The adult male grizzly establishes his dominance over the human who shot him

after a series of trials, joyously regained. More specifically, the nuclear family is reaffirmed in the end, if not completely reconstituted, and ready to begin the cycle anew.

At this structural level, another break with convention that Annaud appears to make in *The Bear* involves his treatment of the surrogate family theme, though, ultimately, this too is guided by convention. Soon after the cub is orphaned, it meets a bullet-wounded adult male grizzly, and the two embark on their incredible journey together. Though we know from animal behavior research since Curwood's time that adult male bears have no paternal instincts or duties beyond copulation, that they often attack and kill cubs out of instinctive defense of their territory against competitors, and that a wounded adult male is the most dangerous kind, wildlife films nonetheless have a way of putting aside such niggling details in pursuit of a good story. What makes an "incredible journey" truly

incredible is, after all, the very unlikelihood of the companions and, further, the mysterious bond that unites them. In Disney's film of Sheila Burnford's novel *The Incredible Journey* (1963) the companions were two dogs and a cat; in *A Tale of Two Critters* (1977), they are a bear cub and a raccoon, and so forth. In the classic model of wildlife film, narrative drives always override instinctual drives when the two come into conflict.

Indeed, these stories can often be seen as parables of suppressed instincts, extolling the values of community and brotherhood among the animals (an extension of the nuclear family structure) especially in times of crisis. Disney's films constantly constructed whole scenes in order to make the point visually: in *Perri,* a cataclysmic fire forces a skunk and a procupine to share a floating log that whisks them to safety together, while elsewhere a squirrel clings to the back of a bobcat as it fords the current. The lesson is that "hostilities" (technically not present in an actual predator/prey relationship) can be overcome, or suspended, when animals rationally face the neessity of banding together against a common peril. In the case of *The Bear,* that peril is embodied by armed human beings, making the unlikely partnership between the bears seem all the more necessary.

Still, a question remains regarding the mother's death: why kill off one adult guardian and companion only to replace it with another? Many wildlife films actually do center on the relationship of a mother and her young through the seasons, but the particular narrative pattern that characterizes *The Bear* (journey, trial, struggle, etc.) is more in the line of a *male* outdoor adventure, and make no mistake, despite a brief "love scene" between the male grizzly and a passing female, this is an all-male film. Also, as indicated earlier, much of the drama in these stories comes from seeing the family unit sundered, then mended or reconstituted through struggle, sacrifice, and *love.*

Yet there are other, more literary conventions at work in Curwood's story (which, reportedly, was drawn from personal experience). The fact is, for there to be a climactic confrontation with humans (an essential ingredient in the incredible journey narrative), the particular humans portrayed here need an adversary who is sufficiently deadly and menacing for them to prove themselves against. In such a scenario, there would be little enough glory in shooting a female in the first place, let alone one who is only defending her offspring. Yet the story demands that the mother be discarded nonetheless so that: (a) her cub is tutored in survival skills by an acknowledged "master" grizzly, one who shows supreme cunning and strength in "battle," and (b) so that the conflict with the human hunters can be played out as a traditional, primal struggle between warrior males.

At this point, Kaar, the huge grizzly (played by Bart, a seasoned film veteran), takes on some of the mythic, totemic proportions of Faulkner's "Old Ben," in his classic story also called *The Bear.* Indeed, Curwood's original title, *The Grizzly King,* clearly refers to the fearsome larger bear, while Annaud's retitled version centers on Youk, the cub. One reason for this is that Annaud has taken a story from a different genre and adapted it to meet the demands of wildlife film conventions. Though

Curwood's bear-hunter character allows his prey to live in the end, the story up to that point falls into the same basic category as Faulkner's, as well as Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *Track of the Cat.* In these, the totem animal becomes an open symbol onto which characters project personal obsessions of mythical and metaphysical dimensions, but in the guise of a profound and abiding respect. Then they kill it. When an animal in western literature becomes "the god of the wilderness," it will usually be worshipped in a most destructive fashion. As Freud argued in *Totem and Taboo,* this death does not serve to demystify the victim, but only to elevate him to a higher level of symbolic (totemic) abstraction—and further misunderstanding. The deep respect the protagonists claim to have for their victims, and the dignity they pretend to accord them, achieve their apotheosis in ritual slaughter. Though Curwood's resolution (the hunter's humanitarian epiphany in the story's denouement) reverses this, as well as the traditional theme of the heroic conquest of nature, the novel remains essentially a drama of man against beast. Annaud's film, in focusing on the cub's coming-of-age experiences, tells the story even less as a tale of masculine combat, and more as one of "education" in the wilds —for both the cub and the hunter. The parallel underscores Curwood's live-and-let-live theme, while the close-up drama of an animal's survival in nature remains in the tradition of Salten and, yes, Disney.

There have been other film-makers all along doing interesting things with the wildlife genre; Sweden's Arne Sucksdorff and Canada's Bill Mason come to mind, though, like the others, they have been largely unrecognized. There are also a number of structural variations in addition to the "classic" model of which *The Bear* is an example. It is, after all, but a small step from Annaud's film to Carroll Ballard's *Never Cry Wolf,* and from there into the cinematic mainstream. It is too early to tell if Annaud leaves the wildlife genre behind having brought it a new measure of respect; certainly he has left his indelible mark on it, but whether this is enough to raise the general level of reception of these films from a vague apprehension to an enlightened appreciation remains to be seen. Ultimately, while *The Bear* is inescapably a genre film, Annaud is anything but a genre director, and no doubt his next work will be characteristically exploratory and provocative. DEREK BOUSE

The Icicle Thief

Written and directed by, and starring Maurizio Nichetti. Cinematography: Mario Battistoni. Music: Manuel de Sica. Aries Film Releasing.

Even the most occasional television viewer can recall a favorite moment of infelicitous commercial interruption. Who can forget Alfred Hitchcock turning his disdainful profile away as he

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2. The entire quotation reads: "I think I will always be more inclined to film programs devoted to the life story of one particular animal. This is the classic format for wildlife films, and though I've never been reluctant to break the rules, it really is the most satisfying approach for a cinematographer." From his book, *Wild America* (New York: *Times* Books, 1988), p. 219.
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introduced "the most distasteful pahrt of our prograhm, the cummuhrcial" during his half-hour suspense programs of the sixties? Or the antacid, hemorrhoid, and headache preparations that punctuate the sour pronouncements of government officials for the nightly news? My recent favorite was the ad featuring Romanian exile Georgi Samfir tunefully playing the Romanian pan-pipes between CNN reports of the grisly Ceaucescu execution. With *Icicle Thief* we have—at last—a film that acknowledges and explores this phenomenon as both ridiculous and outrageous—and ripe for reception-theorists.

Neorealism meets neocapitalism in *The Icicle Thief (Ladri di saponette),* an inventive Italian comedy that shows us what happens when the soapy melodrama of Italian neorealism is cross-bred with contemporary consumeritis. But writer-director-comedian Maurizio Nichetti has not stolen from nor even savaged Vittorio de Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* for his own *Ladri di saponette* (the name of the film-within-the-film), even if the total effect of *The Icicle Thief* is a savage denunciation of the entire apparatus of couch-potato culture.

We first glimpse the interplay between the black-and-white *Ladri di saponette* and its audience when Bruno, a little working-class altar boy, stares out of the TV monitor into the living room of a bourgeois Italian "viewing family," complete with pregnant mama babbling about pumpkin pasta to her husband, who perks up only for the sexy models in the color commercials. The postwar urchin hungrily watches the modern little boy chomping on a "Big Big" candy bar. For a moment, we are forced to wonder if junk food is the answer to bridging European class distinctions. But only a moment—for Nichetti's social issues are secondary to his artistic concerns, and we are captivated by the *Purple Rose of Cairo* absurdity of Bruno returning to *Rome Open City* singing the Big-Big jingle.

The Icicle Thief operates on four different planes of reality, which is perhaps the most convenient way to explore the way Nichetti laces his gags with significance. The past is captured in the black-and-white movie being presented; the modern world of broken images is splattered around in the TV commercials; the director sits in a Milan TV studio watching those two worlds collide; and a pasta-pudgy family watches this zany concatenation of media reality slip by on their boob-tube with utter unconcern, although the characters literally speak to them.

A deliberately disjoined modernist (not structuralist) work, the single unifying theme of *The Icicle Thief* is thievery. The central idea of theft, whether it be stealing into another plane of existence, ripping off one's forefathers' films, or the bogus charge of counterfeiting which gets Nichetti thrown in jail by 1940s police who've never seen 1980s 10,000-lire notes, is the driving force behind the movie's playful message: television is the trickster-thief of film. This notion of theft can apply to the manner in which commercials despoil the dialogue, pace, and style of movies; or to the Italian film appropriating for her sex appeal a blond American bombshell from an ad; or the director plundering the past; or even the uproarious resolution which brings the Permattei family back together as mama Maria rolls in six shopping carts brimming with products looted from the future to feed her family.

Although the concrete robbery occurs when the fictional hero Antonio steals a chandelier for his beloved Maria, who once saw a movie with a *lampadario* glittering "like icicles," Nichetti's larger concern is the breaking and entering of cinema by its sponsors. Nichetti is a bird-dog of pop culture, sniffing out images with iconographic potential in a world where art has become utterly dependent upon commerce. His potpouri of film and television, tragedy and the sound-bite, auteurism and Pirandellian characters, is an amusingly structured homage to cinematic tradition—set in the hubristic context of the broadcasting of masterpieces in juxtaposition to products. In fact, Nichetti has accomplished some ironically instructive, disjunctive cuts from neorealist romance to hyperbolic product-pushing and even deliberately placed the commercials, as the TV producers do, eleven minutes apart. What promises to be an essay on the crimes of commercialism becomes a fantastic mixed-media production, borrowing from science fiction the thin premise that a black-out in an Italian city can fuse together fact and fiction, past and present.

The film opens on a hallway into a TV studio; our POV is that of the young film director arriving to be interviewed by a self-important critic—the actual Italian TV host/critic Claudio Fulva, who's polishing up his critical cliches while being

powdered for the camera. Fulva's commentary displays the snobbism of European film criticism, with its propensity toward heavy analysis of the critique of America implicit in the work of directors like John Frankenheimer, not to mention its incessant rediscoveries and re-evaluations of European directors.

Director Nichetti, not reluctant to cue his critics, uses Fulva's intellectual clout to remind us that the conventions of Italian neorealism have been successfully recapitulated. The black-and-white hero Antonio Permattei (also played by Nichetti, with affecting simplicity) searches for employment of any kind. He leaves a knot of disgruntled laborers in front of a factory, goes to a weaver and garage mechanic, prays in a cathedral, considers black-marketeering. This sequence accumulates the details of a postwar Italian proletariat becoming disenchanted with peacetime poverty and turning toward socialism. Meanwhile, the film critic has eschewed "Nichetti's bambini" to fawn over French director Jean-Pierre Melville's nostalgic 1969 *L'armée des ombres,* observing ex cathedra, "how one can return to the traditions of one's own country without rhetoric but with the convictions of one's own time."

Of course, he should be speaking of Nichetti, a proverbial "prophet in his own land," as we shall see. It is no small accomplishment for a film-maker with the kooky cult status of Nichetti to bury his own style in order to recreate a work that looks 40 years old and may remind people of much better movies. It was a calculated risk that paid off, first, because Nichetti admires De Sica and Rossellini enough to adhere to their humanism, and secondly, because Nichetti also makes films about people at work. His film-within is about labor: seeking work to support the family, a common theme of neorealism. What *Ladri di saponette* becomes, however, as a result of the cross-pollination of commercials, is a fish-out-of-water sit-com when the model disrupts Antonio's marriage and his wife Maria benefits from the switch to find refuge, singing Verdi with a mop and bucket but, at least, in Technicolor.

The studio where this unholy alliance of film and television is occurring is a perilous terrain from the moment Nichetti enters. Nichetti's pratfall comedy is at its most slippery in the first ten minutes, as he loosens up his audience by falling down,

Maurizio Nichetti in *The Icycle Thief*

splashing paint, sliding rubbery-legged on wet surfaces, ripping his coat, losing his trousers, and being generally mauled by the process of appearing on television—foreshadowing what will happen to his film.

Nichetti the comic performer has the contained discipline of the stage, where he studied before running off to join the circus as an acrobatic clown. He trained at Giorgio Strehler's prominent Piccolo Teatro in Milan, where productions of classical dramas are turned inside out in unpredictable ways, an agenda he has not forgotten in his film-making (he will shoot his fifth film in May.) He emerged as the live animator in the cartoon classic *Allegro non troppo* by Bruno Bozzetto, with whom he wrote a series of "Mr. Rossi" feature-length cartoons. His directorial debut *Ratataplan* won the 1979 Golden Lion at Venice. He followed with *Ho fatto Splash* (I Made a Splash, 1980) and *Domani si balle* (Tomorrow We Dance, 1982), before successfully charting "the vast wasteland" with the continental equivalent of *Saturday Night Live,* his *Quo Vadiz* (sic, 1985) and Europe's answer to *Sesame Street,* his linguistically nonspecific *Pista* (1986–7).

Nichetti's signature is a mop of messy hair and a scrub-brush moustache; he peers out at a chaotic world through round spectacles atop his nob of a nose and wiry, five-foot-two physique. You can sense the bouncy energy between his knees and his nose that makes him a clown, although you'd never catch him playing deep into the camera like a Robin Williams or struggling through the physically and psychologically entangled feats of Steve Martin. Nichetti's approach to the madness of modernity has been mute until he found voice for *Icicle Thief.* He combines Jacques Tati's loopy exasperation

with Buster Keaton's impassive triumph over impending disaster.

To the production team in the studio, Nichetti is just another night's work, complicated by an electrical black-out, clearly not atypical in Italy. The reality of the studio involves the countdown process of getting a show on the air on time in a way that guarantees maximum commercial breaks. Hanging monitors instantly reflect the results of their efforts, but they also permit the auteur to watch hucksters stepping on the lines of his tragic characters, shortly before the electrical snafu causes the whole film to run amok, as Nichetti's dramatis personae take to the medium of their choice.

In a truly inspired moment of merging these worlds into one space-time continuum, Antonio rescues a blond model from a country-side canal where she is drowning after diving into a swimming pool in a modern commercial. Drying her off with his coat, he wipes away her color and she enters miraculously into the impoverished and emotional world of black and white. Outraged when he brings this trollop home ("a foreigner half-naked"), Maria throws herself into the same waters, only to emerge ecstatic; "I want to live my life in color!" This is a wry moment that calls on us to admit that, yes, Virginia, life has improved since color. And Maria's desire to reap the rewards of materialism are a reminder that ideology no longer seems to triumph over a need, actual or assumed, for things: after all, half of Europe has just staked its claims in a revolt against socialism, because mass media showed them what the masses weren't getting.

When *The Icicle Thief* won the Grand Prix at the 1989 Moscow Film Festival, nobody wrote about its ambivalence toward consumer culture; perhaps they all identified far too readily with Maria but found the film's overt disapproval of television more convenient. After acknowledging Nichetti's various confrontations with reality—in the Milan TV studio, in postwar Rome, in ads for cars, candy and cleaning agents—we must admire his feisty battles for artistic control. Nichetti's fourth plane of reality, however, shows us a world that our little director cannot penetrate: the living room.

The family that has been our frame of reference or target audience has responded with little or no reaction to the bizarre cross-fertilization of TV and cinematic tradition. The father flips through the paper, pausing to ogle the blond, while his wife discusses her pregnancy on the phone. As the movie began, their little boy dumped a load of Lego blocks in front of the TV set and got to work on the key image of *The Icicle Thief*. By the end, his Legos have been structured into an impressive cathedral that looks unnervingly like the Kremlin, albeit in a computerized-graphics version.

Nichetti's comedy has the exhilarating impact of an elaborate Lego construction, including surprise that something so sophisticated could emerge from such rudimentary building blocks. We see facets of the hardware of contemporary culture contrasted with the humanistic, romantic, almost superfluous chandelier, an obscure object of desire to be sure, when compared to the functional, practical bicycle snitched 40 years before. Likewise, Nichetti's own mind is refracted through these comic conceptions, revealing an intellect mechanical, modern, and maniacal that can be trapped, in the final image, in the television set and shut off by the tired housewife.

There is no doubt that Nichetti is an original, with a unique vision. Surrealism, not neorealism, is his calling card, although he has been credited with the salvation of cinema by a recent turn of events. In November 1989 the Appellate Court in Rome upheld and broadened a lower court's ruling that private television companies in Italy could not insert any commercials into a movie. Such interruptions, in the opinion of the court, "alter the identity" of a film and therefore violate its director's rights. Had the court seen Nichetti's film, in release in the months before the decision, when they pronounced, "Any pause for huckstering de-

Surreal neorealism:
The Icycle Thief

stroys the integrity of a film, be it a classic or something a few rungs down the ladder?"

In a country where film production is made possible by television, Nichetti would appear to be biting the hand that feeds him. But his proficiency at commercials must not be overlooked, no matter his auteurist poses.

"You're the director!" shrieks the blond model towering over the director who has come to turf her out of his film. "I've always wanted to meet an Italian director. I just love your movies—in the black and white!" Several scenes later, she vows to return to advertising, because "in film, people suffer too much." We may sigh over Nichetti's knock-kneed neorealism, but let's also relish his caveat. Nostalgia for kinder, gentler notions is sure to get tangled in transmission. KAREN JAEHNE

The Peddler

Written, directed, and edited by Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Music: M. Entezamy. Photography: Homayun Payvar (first episode), Mehrdad Fakhimi (second), Ali R. Zarindast (third). Iran, 1987.

Few Westerners going to see a recent Iranian film produced by the Organization for the Propagation of Islamic Thought would expect to find technical sophistication, a script inspired in part by a European story, and a vision of post-revolutionary Tehran so bleak that none of the characters, including the faithful at a mosque, commands affection or respect. I have no idea what *The Peddler* means to its maker or to its Iranian viewers—the questionnaire I sent in care of the Tehran Film Office went unanswered—but over here its grim brilliance confronts the image of Iran as a totalitarian theocracy. The news release issued by the Film Society of Lincoln Center had it right: *The Peddler* was the revelation of the 1989 New Directors/New Films festival. It was in some ways the most surprising film of the year.

The film consists of three tenuously connected episodes. The first, "The Happy Child," is based on a story by Alberto Moravia. A poor married couple who are cousins live in an abandoned bus with their four children, all of whom have some physical handicap. The wife is about to give birth again, and the husband believes the baby will be physically sound if brought up in better circumstances. The parents try unsuccessfully to have the baby boy kept at the hospital. They then leave him in a basket in front of a mosque, hoping for a well-to-do foster parent, but a beggar woman takes him as a prop to enhance her appeal. The parents retrieve the baby and place the basket inside the mosque near two prosperous-looking men, who merely peek in it and then continue discussing business. Finally the father leaves the baby at the estate of a wealthy man he once worked for, and the couple go home contented. But the baby is not accepted: the episode ends with him back in the hospital—in a ward for retarded children.

The second episode, "The Birth of an Old Woman," focuses on a man who lives with his mother, a woman so ancient and decrepit that she can neither move nor speak. As the son prepares meals, cleans the apartment and trundles his mother about in her wheelchair, he delivers a continuous litany of wishes and complaints, saying among other things that he could find a good job and get married if she were dead. They live solely on her pension, which he leaves the apartment once a month to collect. This time, returning home with food and her drugs, he is knocked unconscious by a car. Passers-by—including the couple from Episode 1—pretend to help but steal his purchases. Two men in a van—who will reappear in Episode 3—say they will take him to a hospital but instead drive out of the city, rob him, and dump him on the road. Meanwhile the mother sits in her wheelchair on the balcony, where the son had left her. At midnight she fades away, to reappear as a little girl in a passing carriage. Eventually the son returns home and resumes his chores and monologue as if the mother were still alive.

In Episode 3, "The Peddler," a young man is selling stolen shirts for a criminal gang when he is hustled away by two other gang members—the men who robbed the son in Episode 2. A brief flashback reveals that the peddler saw the two execute another member, and he is afraid that he too is about to be silenced. At one point he jumps out of the van, starts to run and is shot down—but this turns out to be the first of several scenes, all ending with the peddler's death, that appear real but represent

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In Episode 3, "The Peddler," a young man is selling stolen shirts for a criminal gang when he is hustled away by two other gang members—the men who robbed the son in Episode 2. A brief flashback reveals that the peddler saw the two execute another member, and he is afraid that he too is about to be silenced. At one point he jumps out of the van, starts to run and is shot down—but this turns out to be the first of several scenes, all ending with the peddler's death, that appear real but represent

The peddler himself in trouble, in Episode 3

his terrified imagination. He is taken to a cafe where the gang boss talks with him for a while before leading him down to the basement. The boss shows other stolen goods that the gang is now expanding into, and then says that the peddler is not reliable. The two strongarm men reappear. The peddler dodges them, fights back, and bursts through a wall to the street. But this escape is only imagined: he enters a hearse with no driver, passes the carriage with the little girl/mother from Episode 2, and sees the executed man apparently alive. The peddler collapses and is back in the basement, dead.

By itself, the overlapping of characters between episodes is superficial, but there are other, more significant links. Episode 2 begins with a small crowd pursuing an old man and jeering, "He's crazy!" This pursuit leads to the sidwalk below the son's and mother's apartment, where the son harangues them, plays a trumpet and drum and engages them in a brief water fight. Following upon the scene of the retarded children that closes Episode 1, these incidents suggest what the "happy child" may eventually become—a "crazy" man or an obsessive eccentric. Midway through Episode 2, Makhmalbaf inserts a scene in which a car cuts across a busy street and the driver is dragged out by an angry crowd, and this apparent digression may foreshadow the peddler's fear when driven off in Episode 3.

There are at least two general progressions throughout the film. Virtually all of Episode 1 is realistic, with no unusual camera setups or lighting effects and with fairly sparse dialogue against a background of natural sounds. Only at the end is there an expressionistic flourish as the camera dollies back from the baby in its hospital crib to reveal the retarded children all around, while disembodied laughter echoes on the sound track. Most of Episode 2 is realistic, too, but involves more dramatic contrasts: crowds and busy streets with their confusion of sounds, the enclosed apartment with the son's monologue and the mother's silence. Toward the end the episode dips into fantasy, beginning as the uncanny silence of the mother on the balcony is broken by the midnight chimes of the clock, which (in another touch of expressionism) shift into slow motion. After the mother's transformation into the young girl in the carriage, the arrival of the son returns the film to apparent realism: but now he is living a fantasy in which his mother is still alive. This foreshadows the strategy of Episode 3, which quickly compromises its apparent realism by revealing parts of it as imagined. The contrasts here are even stronger than in Episode 2: the static crowd in the market; the speedy van ride, accompanied by heavy incidental music; the soft, sinister speech of the crime boss amid the echoing chatter of the cafe. Eventually, with its Bergmanesque death sequence, the episode travels further into fantasy than Episode 2; and even when it returns to realism with the peddler's dead body there is an accompaniment of suspenseful music that modulates without a break into an ethereal chorale. This introduces an odd coda in which the camera circles around what appears to be a fetus in a jar. Recalling as it does the Star Child at the end of *2001,* the coda points to the birth of a new life beyond the reality that the central characters have all found too painful to confront.

The progression from realism to fantasy is reflected in the film's lighting and sound levels. Episode 1 begins in the extensive waste lot where the married cousins live: it is daytime and the sun is shining in a broad expanse of blue sky. The whole of the episode takes place in the daytime, but it ends indoors, in the ward for retarded children. Except for the disembodied laughter at the end, the sounds are casual and unemphatic. Episode 2 begins outdoors, also in the daytime, and includes a lengthy exterior sequence in which the son collects the check and is robbed. Much of the action, how-

ever, takes place in the dark-walled apartment where mother and son live, and the episode ends at night. The sounds are generally louder (crowds, street traffic, trumpet and drum) or more insistent (the son's monologue) than anything in Episode 1. Episode 3 begins in gray exteriors, proceeds into a dimly lit cafe and descends to an even more dimly lit basement; the peddler's final fantasy, in which he breaks out into the world of the dead, takes place on nighttime streets. Meanwhile, in several key scenes, incidental music adds its weight to the emphatic natural sounds and dialogue. Thus the three episodes form an overlapping progression from light to dark in the image, from light to heavy in the sound.

I am in no position to relate *The Peddler* to Iranian film making in general, since I have seen only one other film made in Iran—Sohrab Shahid Saless's prerevolutionary *A Simple Event* (1973)—and two postrevolutionary films made in the US by exiles—Parviz Sayyad's *The Mission* (1983) and Ghasem Ebrahimian's *The Suitors* (1988). The partly annotated list of films in Bahman Maghsoudlou's *Iranian Cinema* (New York, 1987) suggests that most prerevolutionary commercial production was heavily influenced by Hollywood, since it featured many remakes of American films (including such unlikely inspirations as *Cape Fear* and *Cat Ballou*). *A Simple Event,* however, focused like *The Peddler* on the bleak underside of life: its central character, the only son of poor parents, is caught between the demands of school work and the work he has to do for his family; almost incidentally, his mother dies. Although Saless's style suggests neorealism rather than Makhmalbaf's sophisticated eclecticism, he gives his film a powerful formal shape by having his young protagonist move everywhere at a trot—as if the pressure of poverty and labor is hurrying him visibly from childhood to premature old age.

One of the exiles' films, *The Suitors,* throws into relief the problem of appreciating a film made in a different culture. The narrative of *The Suitors* stems directly from the slaughtering of a sheep in the bathroom of a New York City apartment shared by a group of Iranians. The killing is shown obliquely, so that quite possibly it did not take place in reality. In *The Peddler,* by contrast, Episode 3 opens with a frontal view of the cutting of a sheep's throat on a balcony; the dripping of blood onto the courtyard below leads the camera down to the peddler. While the makers of *The Suitors* may have taken American sensibilities into account, no such issue existed for Makhmalbaf. Other parts of the film may seem callous toward humans: in Episode 1, actually deformed children play the cousins' offspring and actually retarded children appear in the hospital sequences. Yet beyond such prickly details, the film shows a continual sympathy for marginal members of society—the poor and the ignorant, the eccentric and the unfortunate, the old and the intimidated.

Certainly *The Peddler* carries no overtones of the fanaticism that Khomeini's Iran displayed to the outside world—its transcendental rage not only against the Great Satan but also against its secular neighbor Iraq, its universal contract on Salman Rushdie, etc. The one incident that suggests xenophobia (of a kind that could happen almost anywhere) shows the police singling out Afghans for suspicion of the first killing in Episode 3, when a flashback has already made it clear that they are innocent. Similarly, the film offers no approval of the Muslim fundamentalism that strains this nonbeliever's tolerance. Although the few women who appear are subordinate, as in Iranian reality, Makhmalbaf presents this with a touch of irony: the husband in Episode 1 petulantly blames his wife for the failure of the mosque attempt that had been his idea. The mother in Episode 2, mute and paralyzed, may even be taken as the *reductio ad absurdum* of Khomeini's ideal woman; and Makhmalbaf in a sense liberates her at the end by showing the healthy young girl she once had been.

All of these cultural and social issues raise a critical question: Is *The Peddler* of interest only because it offers a glimpse into a country that has made itself forbiddingly enigmatic? Certainly that glimpse adds to its interest; certainly, too, the film's eclectic style and dark vision would seem less striking if it came from a Western country. But it is meaningless to separate these apparent incidentals from the film's "essence." In retrospect, after the first surprise has passed, *The Peddler* remains a powerful memory. As hard as it may be to like, this is an easy film to admire.

WILLIAM JOHNSON

Book Reviews

Chaplin and American Culture
The Evolution of a Star Image

By Charles J. Maland. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

The centennial of the birth of Charles Spencer Chaplin has been met by American film scholars with a fair amount of neglect. The Museum of Modern Art mounted a retrospective with a nicely assembled wall show and published an admirable panegyric by Charles Silver (*Charles Chaplin: An Appreciation*), but there has been no scholarly conference to mark the occasion, no special issues of journals. Is serious interest in Chaplin, the filmmaker who first brought serious attention to film, at a low ebb? Of course, a number of important new works on Chaplin surfaced over the last decade without waiting for the felicities of the hundred year mark: Kevin Brownlow's television series *The Unknown Chaplin* (1982), David Robinson's massive biography *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985), and the first volume of Harry Geduld's *Chapliniana* (1987). But the comparative silence marks, I fear, a slipping of one of cinema's most challenging artists through the fingers of the current generation of film academics.

Therefore this volume by Maland stands almost alone as a new Chaplin study. While it doesn't compensate for the neglect, it does show that Chaplin scholarship not only survives but has moved into new territory. Although it follows the course of Chaplin's career from Keystone films to his posthumous fate at the hands of graverobbers like IBM, whose computer ad campaign Maland probes in an ironic epilogue, Maland's book is not a new biography.

With a fair amount of theoretical precision, Maland defines a topic that is more (and also less) than Chaplin's life and art. Following Richard Dyer's approach to the star phenomenon, Maland pieces together the way the Chaplin star image was made, unmade, and remade in the US over seven decades. While Chaplin's films provide the major source, his star image is filtered through a series of other discourses: studio promotion, press publicity, and film reviews. Neither Chaplin's character—"Charlie"—nor Chaplin, the man, define this image entirely. Rather the star image is a shifting configuration, made of relations—and tensions—between several elements; the joint product of Chaplin, his audiences and the discourses that circulate between them—legal, political, social, and aesthetic.

Chaplin provides a unique instance of the star image. His unparalleled popularity, a career that nearly spans the entire course of film stardom, his highly public persona, and the enormous control he could assert (as owner of his own studio) over the development of his image, all combine to make him a particularly fascinating case study. At its best Maland's book captures the tug of war between the different factors which determined this image, particularly between the tramp, "Charlie," and his creator, Chaplin. While Chaplin was able to maintain a unique control over his film character, the image that he projected as a public personality increasingly escaped him and became the province of gossipmongers, reactionaries, and FBI stooges. As Maland shows, in the forties and fifties the public image of Chaplin goes sour as the serious artist and statesman gives way to a public perception of aging lecher and unpatriotic red.

This tarnishing of Chaplin's image draws the lion's share of Maland's attention, and, even from a biographical point of view, there is a great deal of new material here. Maland's research has been thorough, uncovering a theater-of-the-absurd atmosphere in the persecution of Chaplin. A rumor spread by columnist Hedda Hopper (dredged up by Maland from FBI files on Chaplin) provides a nightmarish example. Hopper claimed that Chaplin's lawyers had bribed the jury in his Mann act acquittal—her source, a woman who had received a supernatural vision of the pay-off. Luckily the FBI were skeptical and announced they were awaiting "more specific information." In its account of the Barry trials, the FBI surveillance of Chaplin, the American Legion boycott of his films, and the political maneuvers that led to the revocation of Chap-

lin's re-entry permit by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1952, Maland's book does more than supplement Robinson. *Chaplin and American Culture* provides a vivid picture of the context of both Chaplin's own politics and the irrational response of a paranoid and vengeful society.

By surveying responses to Chaplin in both major circulation conservative newspapers (like the *Chicago Tribune*) and marginal leftist publications (like the *Daily Worker*), Maland captures the contrasting ways Chaplin's image was processed by different political constituencies. Maland does not try to boil this all down into a composite picture, but lets the star image exist as a zone of contention, with a dominant view of Chaplin contested by a minority-view. This dynamic approach in itself makes Maland's book a model to follow, one which avoids monolithic characterizations of American culture.

However, Maland's careful research reveals this dynamic aspect of the star image without bringing it clearly into theoretical focus. For instance, Maland points out that an overt treatment of social themes differentiates *Modern Times* from previous Chaplin films, but he also notes that Chaplin's own publicity for the film downplayed its social content. Conservative reviewers followed suit, while leftist reviewers stressed the film's political message. How does a film historian deal with this polysemic situation? Perhaps it is enough to point it out, as Maland does, but clearly it raises an issue of vital importance to understanding film's role in culture. Maland's invocation of some of the concepts of reception theory does not seem to solve the problem. For instance, dealing with the generally negative critical reaction to the *The Great Dictator,* Maland uses Hans Robert Jauss's concept of the horizons of expectations that viewers bring to an art work and the displeasure that results when it seems to break the aesthetic contract previously established between audience and artist. *The Great Dictator,* Maland points out, breaks with the patterns of previous Chaplin films, particularly in the speech Chaplin delivers at the end of the film. This all makes sense, but then how does Maland explain his own statement that *The Great Dictator* was one of Chaplin's all-time audience successes, breaking box-office records? Was the aesthetic contract with audiences more flexible?

It is certainly not a damning criticism of Maland's work to say that it raises questions it can't answer. The value of this work lies in its simultaneous uncovering of new information and its formulation of new issues. However, I think it does allow us to point out the limitations of a reception theory that bases itself so strongly on other discourses at the expense of a reading of the films themselves. Although Maland provides a host of new approaches to Chaplin, this is not the book to turn to for new readings of the films. For the most part, Maland stays within the safe confines of content analyses. The careful formal analysis that forms part of Jauss's aesthetics of reception play little role here. The fragments of a potentially insightful contrast between Chaplin's films and the evolving norms of the Classical Hollywood Cinema appears here and there (as in the discussion of the end of *The Great Dictator*), but Maland never foregrounds this aspect of his work.

This problem takes another form when one notices the proportions of Maland's study. Less than a third is devoted to Chaplin's silent era, while nearly half deals with his career after *The Great Dictator.* One can argue that this is the meatiest—and certainly the most tension-filled—era of Chaplin's relation to American culture. However, I suspect that the relative neglect of the silent era derives from a comparative lack of print material. During the early part of Chaplin's career, writing about the cinema found many fewer outlets than it did in the forties and fifties. Maland makes excellent use of early print material and his research seems exhaustive. However, does bulk equal interest? The issues that Maland isolates so well in Chaplin's early career—the conflict between his comedy and the Genteel Tradition, for instance—seem to me of equal importance to the later political turmoil. I don't believe Maland claims they aren't, but they get overwhelmed by the mass of material on sex and politics in the latter part of the book.

I don't believe that any of this later material is unimportant. Maland has written one of the best monographs of film culture in the postwar period in this section. But as a total picture of Chaplin, it is possibly out of balance. Besides more attention to the films, some consideration of the way Chaplin's films fit into the evolving traditions of film comedy might help define the proper context of the

silent films. Maland is excellent in placing Chaplin's political views in the context of the wartime popular front, but what about Chaplin's position in relation to the Arbuckle scandal, or the formation of the Hays office? At times Maland's scope seems both too broad (American culture at large) and too narrow (material directly on Chaplin), while the key context of the evolving Hollywood industry and the complexities of the films themselves elude his grasp.

But why demand that this useful book say everything about Chaplin? Clearly that is unreasonable. However, the book's own ambitions call for a serious consideration of its limitations. It is only because Maland tries to summarize the reception of Chaplin in the seventies, for instance, that one feels the need to point out that he ignores Walter Kerr's *The Silent Clowns* (to my mind a much more influential account of Chaplin than Gerald Mast's), or to point out his gaffe in describing Andrew Sarris's 1968 comments on Chaplin as "echoing" a 1972 Vincent Canby essay.

In summary this is far from a rehash of previous material. Maland pioneers a new approach to Chaplin, one that is as rich in the issues it raises as in those it resolves. Anyone interested in Chaplin (and I hope that still includes most people seriously interested in film) must read it. And those engaged in the task of bringing to film history a new awareness of the cultural and political context of film production and reception will find this a book to think about, argue with, and learn from.

TOM GUNNING

In the Realm of Pleasure

Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic

By Gaylyn Studlar. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. $29.95.

Early on in this "overtly polemical intervention in contemporary film theory's approach to visual pleasure," Gaylyn Studlar illuminates the interdependent psychodynamic and textual structures of masochism and distinguishes its qualitative difference from sadism by returning to the literary prototypes that gave each perversion its name. She quotes the following from Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs:*

> To love and be loved, what joy! And yet this splendour pales in comparison with the blissful torment of worshipping a woman who treats one as a plaything, of being the slave of a beautiful tyrant who mercilessly tramples one underfoot.

Venus in Furs might well be Josef von Sternberg's *Blonde Venus,* or Amy Jolly, Helen Faraday, Magda, Shanghai Lily, Catherine the Great, and Conchita Perez—all cinematic embodiments of Wanda, Sacher-Masoch's own obscure object of desire. Throughout *In the Realm of Pleasure,* Studlar uses the von Sternberg/Dietrich films made at Paramount between 1930 and 1935 as exemplars of texts informed by what, following Gilles Deleuze's revisionary work on masochism, she identifies as a "masochistic aesthetic." However, her primary goal is neither a psychobiography of von Sternberg as masochistic male fetishist nor mere textual explication of the narrative and visual strategies that generate the von Sternberg "style" in *Morocco, Blonde Venus, Dishonored, Shanghai Express, The Scarlet Empress,* and *The Devil is a Woman*—films, she notes, that frequently have been "linked obliquely to masochism."

Studlar's project is far more theoretically radical and contentious than would be an auteurist psychobiography or exegesis on cinematic style. Using Deleuze's *Masochism: An Interpretation in Coldness and Cruelty* as her tutor-text and borrowing from a wide range of contemporary psychoanalytic work on object relations and the "dream screen" of the maternal breast, Studlar courageously—and, for the most part, convincingly—offers "a psychoanalytic-semiotic countertheory" to that theory which has "conceptualized cinematic pleasure on the basis of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis," and dominated contemporary discourse on the cinema—particularly feminist film theory—over the last 15 years. Studlar's countertheory also critiques the Saussurean model of linguistic representation whose binarisms have complemented and informed these psychoanalytic models—based, as they are, on binarily conceived phallocentric psychic mechanisms: that is, on *either* the presence *or* absence of the desired object, on *either* having *or*

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lacking a penis, and thus on castration anxiety, Oedipal desire, narcissisistic and sadistic voyeurism. Indeed, Studlar's purpose in using the von Sternberg/Dietrich films is to challenge those binary and oppositional structures privileged as primary in the construction of meaning and pleasure found in the cinematic experience: *presence/absence, masochism /sadism, spectacle/narrative, the split subject,* and *sexual difference.* Exalting the films' "polymorphous perversity" as paradigmatic of a cinema "informed by pleasures that cannot be accounted for in current theory," Studlar raises to contemporary critical consciousness what has, until very recently, been suppressed by the dominant discourses of feminist film theory—that is, "a primary pleasure of the cinema that is beyond sexual differentiation."

Certainly, within the context of contemporary theory, it is more tedious than radical to read of the regressive, neurotic, and perverse structures that inhere in both the cinematic apparatus and the experience of spectatorial pleasure. In framing the film experience within the psychoanalytic compass of a perversion, Studlar does not lack for company. What is radical (and, for me, most valuable) about her argument is its emphasis on *polymorphism,* on its recognition of the primary "both/and" structure and possibilities of cinematic identification and pleasure. Archaic, pre-genital, and mother-centered in origin, the pleasures that the film experience affords its spectators, Studlar argues, "predate Oedipal conflict, sexual differentiation, or Lacan's mirror phase." And they are found not only in the excess and supersensuality of films —like von Sternberg's—that explicitly reenact masochistic scenarios of fantasy, disavowal, fetishism, and the desired suspension of gratification, but also in those primary processes that implicitly inform the cinematic apparatus and spectatorship.

For Studlar, the link between polymorphism and the perversion of masochism is a necessary one. The masochism she privileges, however, is not the psychic/spectatorial structure binarily opposed to sadism which was first popularized in film theory by Laura Mulvey (who also first drew upon the von Sternberg/Dietrich oeuvre for its explication). It is quite another structure—a great deal more narratively generative and active, and not at all the mere reverse of sadism. Proposing a theory of visual pleasure and cinematic identification based in oral rather than genital stages of psychic development, and centered on the infant's relations to its mother and the breast/dream screen rather than to its father and the penis/phallus, Studlar argues that the primary pleasures of the cinema's breast-like "dream screen" are polymorphous and sexually undifferentiated for both male and female spectators. However, in that this "primary" polymorphism of the cinema always also entails the "secondary" determinations of symbolization, its pleasure is necessarily perverse. That is, Studlar sees the cinematic experience essentially structured by *disavowal*—the spectator's active psychic refusal to acknowledge the "either/or" binarisms informing "adult" Oedipal sexuality and representation so as to enjoy the more ambiguous and mobile "both/and" possibilities informing infantile pre-Oedipal sexuality and meaning. The pleasures gained from this developmentally arrested state are those linked to the developmental arrest and perversion of masochism, which "painfully" delays adult genital gratification for the present "pleasures" of multiple subject positions and a longed-for (but also feared) "loss of ego boundaries analogous to the child's presleep fusion with the breast."

In a compelling move, Studlar also links the masochistic disavowal informing the psychic structure of cinema spectatorship with the cinema's primary mode of semiosis. Charging that Saussure's binary model of linguistic representation is unable to accommodate the ambiguous and polymorphous possibilities of those forms of signification found in both dreams and the movies, she locates the semiological complement to her psychoanalytic theory of the cinematic experience in Charles Saunders Peirce's trichotomy of signs—and, most particularly, in the iconic sign whose relation to its referential object she sees as isomorphic with the "both/and" structure of disavowal. Particularly dominant in the von Sternberg/Dietrich films, but operative to some degree in *all* cinematic texts, "the iconic sign is capable of holding its absent referent in an 'I-know-but-nevertheless' suspension" that constitutes a creative "dialectical play between the conscious and the unconscious," "between the disavowing perverse fantasy and the demands of the reality principle."

For Studlar, then, the cinema "is not a sadistic institution but preeminently a contractual one based

upon the promise of certain pleasures" masochistically disavowed by both spectator and apparatus so as to paradoxically guarantee "a continual suspended acknowledgement of the very thing denied." And, according to Deleuze and Studlar, "the very thing denied" by both the masochist and the spectator is "the oral mother's separation/difference" from the infant. This "fundamental masochistic disavowal . . . forms the substructure of masochism's rejection of reality" and its goal of preserving and protecting its multiple identificatory relations with its ego-ideal—the oral mother. In quite a reversal of the Freudian model, the Deleuzian masochist wishes to reinvoke a pre-Oedipal state of development in which his/her identification is with the mother as both object and subject of desire and his/her object relations are with the breast. Thus, contrary to Freud, the masochist does not enjoy punishment for desiring (to be) the father, for homosexual guilt, nor are fetish object relations structured around the penis/phallus. Rather, masochistic disavowal is a "process that leads to a liberation from superego control." For masochist and spectator, then, the whole point of fantasy and cinema is that the father is *not* in the picture.

Studlar locates the informing pleasure of the cinema precisely in this liberation from the constraints and determinations of superego control, from the Law of the Father and the overdetermination of the Symbolic. Thus she emphasizes not the "pain" of disavowal, but rather the play and pleasure to be found in the contractual masquerade and deferrals of the masochistic scenario that is cinema. The cinema's pleasures may be perverse, but they are not (as much Mulvey-based feminist film theory would have it) "limited to the male spectator, nor are they available to the female only if she abandons a 'masochistic' identification with the passive female object to identify with the privileged 'sadistic' position attributed to the male spectator." Indeed, Studlar argues that the "cinematic apparatus and the masochistic aesthetic offer identificatory positions for male and female spectators that reintegrate psychic bisexuality, offer the sensual pleasures of polymorphous sexuality, and make the male and female one in their identification with and desire for the pre-Oedipal mother."

Fulfillment, however, must always and only be partial. Impossibly desiring both symbiosis with the maternal breast/dream screen and the discrete preservation of his/her ego, the masochist/spectator requires both the illusion and suspension of true intimacy with the object of desire—not its real achievement. Thus, Studlar tells us, the "fantasy of complete 'passivity' and dependence is marked by a framing, imaginary control of the symbiotic alliance/fantasy." In this way, "the fantasy unification of symbiosis is held within the parameters of a distanciation that prevents the subject from being overwhelmed into nonidentity." Masochism's intentional structure of desire requires *separation.* The desired union must not only be forestalled and delayed through an elaborate masquerade both painful and pleasurable, but that masquerade must also be acknowledged and enjoyed by both partners in the scenario as a performance of desire. It is clear that this interpretation of the active and generative structure of masochistic/cinematic desire and its pleasures challenges both the widespread belief in the phallocentric nature of the cinematic apparatus and its spectatorial possibilities—and the popular characterization of that apparatus and classical Hollywood cinema as basically unreflexive and illusionary.

This is the general argument advanced by Studlar through eight rigorously argued chapters, each of which addresses major issues in contemporary film theory: the nature and interplay of identity and gender formation, subject positioning, cinematic representation, and spectatorship. While refocusing theoretical attention from genital/Oedipal to oral/pre-Oedipal psychic mechanisms as "the privileged mode of regressive pleasures available through the cinema," Studlar also insists her aim is not "to reduce cinematic pleasure to one developmental stage or to a purely unconscious functioning." Rather, she suggests, "remnants of different periods are revived" in our cinematic encounters (including the Oedipal period), but "all are acted out within the specific governing modality of cinema's object relation of spectator to screen"—a modality which promotes oral phase pleasures, is polymorphously perverse, and runs counter to the overdetermined phallocentrism that informs current film theory and mocks the liberatory goals of those feminist projects constrained within its terms. Indeed, in its own polymorphously perverse way, particularly in its emphasis on the maternally centered etiology of masochism

and the sexually underdetermined, sensual pleasures of polymorphism, Studlar's goal is both liberatory and feminist. Throughout, she uses the von Sternberg/Dietrich films as exemplary "configurations of desire and identification" in which "fetishism and scopophilia also allow an eroticized spectatorial position for women," and "do not adhere to models of pleasure based on castration fear, Oedipal desire, and sadistic voyeurism." Not only do the films enunciate polymorphously engendered subject positions articulated by shifting structures of the gaze and an exaggerated emphasis on masquerade as articulated by the "self-reflexive representation of woman." They also problematize "the Oedipal family romance structure" of classical cinema by masochistically disrupting normative narrative continuity so as to suspend the fulfillment of desire—a prominent feature of masochism that also forms the basis of all narrative. The films serve as well to further Studlar's extremely important discussions of the iconic sign and the role of the image as both are narratively structured and organized through such visual figures as metaphor and synesthesia, and related to the polymorphously perverse sexuality that disavows the delimitation of sexual difference in the masochistic text.

In her recent work on pornography, Linda Williams raises the question of "what is the most effective feminist use of the notion of perversion." Speaking of the hegemonic "economy of the one" that is unable to see women except in their (non) identity to men, and allows no "authentic, true, or normal position from which to resist the repression of the feminine," she notes the "liberatory potential" contained in the dominant sexual economy's " 'implantation of perversions.' " That is, she suggests that "the inevitable process of the implantation of perversions, of fetishization itself, can be used to break down the opposition between norm and deviation on which repressive forms of power often rely."* Studlar's work on masochism aims precisely at refusing the opposition norm/deviation and its power effect. For her, the cinema's polymorphous perversity affirms "the power of film as a phenomenological experience, engaging us in pleasures that defy the limits of our most cherished assumptions and that may suggest possible avenues of resistance and rebellion to patriarchal imperatives binding women—and men—in their tenacious and repressive hold." This is no mean ambition, and *In the Realm of Pleasure* no small achievement.

Nonetheless, Studlar's general valorization of masochism and perversion suggests that, at times, she has unwittingly fallen into a perverse version of what Williams warns against: acceptance of "a phallic definition of their [women's] different sexuality as perverse." While it is extremely significant that Studlar has rejected that "phallic definition" of the female (and male) spectator's "different sexuality," it is also equally problematic that she has accepted "different sexuality as perverse." In this, she merely extends, albeit significantly enriching, the very Freudian/Lacanian theory she would counter. A truly liberatory reading of "the power of film as a phenomenological experience" would, as it broke down the determinations of sexual difference, also interrogate the differential and value-laden concept of perversity. It is this strange "double standard" which makes reading *In the Realm of Pleasure* often discomfiting. Despite its flaws, however, the book is an important and extremely valuable one and should be read—no less for its rigorous and provocative argument than for its model applications of Peircean semiotics and rhetorical tropes to the von Sternberg/Dietrich films.

VIVIAN SOBCHACK

*Linda Williams, "Fetishism and the Visual Pleasure of Hard Core: Marx, Freud, and the 'Money Shot,' " *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11, no. 2 (1989), pp. 39-40.

The Idea of the Image
Josef von Sternberg's Dietrich Films

By Carole Zucker. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988. $30.00

This is a modest book: an introduction and four chapters covering (in the main) five films over the course of 140 handsomely illustrated pages of text. Zucker's first and last chapters are taxonomic and synchronic, the first considering "The Use of the Frame" as both a graphic "thing in itself" and as a subject of study, the last considering the ways in which stylistic "duality"—the compres-

and the sexually underdetermined, sensual pleasures of polymorphism, Studlar's goal is both liberatory and feminist. Throughout, she uses the von Sternberg/Dietrich films as exemplary "configurations of desire and identification" in which "fetishism and scopophilia also allow an eroticized spectatorial position for women," and "do not adhere to models of pleasure based on castration fear, Oedipal desire, and sadistic voyeurism." Not only do the films enunciate polymorphously engendered subject positions articulated by shifting structures of the gaze and an exaggerated emphasis on masquerade as articulated by the "self-reflexive representation of woman." They also problematize "the Oedipal family romance structure" of classical cinema by masochistically disrupting normative narrative continuity so as to suspend the fulfillment of desire—a prominent feature of masochism that also forms the basis of all narrative. The films serve as well to further Studlar's extremely important discussions of the iconic sign and the role of the image as both are narratively structured and organized through such visual figures as metaphor and synesthesia, and related to the polymorphously perverse sexuality that disavows the delimitation of sexual difference in the masochistic text.

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sion of foreground and background, of animate and inanimate; the doublings of screen/mirror/veil; the displacement and condensation of "roles" in Dietrich's screen persona—is used to elaborate and deepen a similar series of thematic dualities within Sternberg's narratives: pain/pleasure, denial/desire, victim/victor, normality/abnormality, maleness/femaleness, etc., etc.

Zucker's middle two chapters, by happy contrast, proceed chronologically through each of the five films under discussion. In "Aspects of Mise-en-Scène" Zucker discusses how the "content" of the frame (vs. its 2-D organization) contributes to Sternberg's "idea of the image." Here Zucker claims that Sternberg's use of sets and lighting develops an increasingly dream-like disavowal—of Dietrich's relation to the film world (she is set apart, in limbo, via costume and lighting schemes), of the film world's relation to the "real world"—as if he wanted "to invent a world that is situated at a juncture between recognition and obscurity—a place that eludes placement."

A similar development is plotted in Zucker's Chapter 3 discussion of "Performance." "The unpolished gestures of Dietrich as Lola" in *The Blue Angel,* she writes, "correspond to and define the crudeness of the character, whereas in later roles the mediation between actress and role is of central interest." Indeed, in the later films, the explicit stylization of performance is underwritten by Sternberg's meditations on theatricality, on acting, and on Dietrich herself. Partly this involves the use of choreographed gesture patterns, the precisely timed glance, the tilt of the head; it also involves a sustained frontality, often in conjunction with static postures which lend exaggerated significance to the play of otherwise minimal gestures; involved as well are long takes which provide (contra Bazin) an appropriately theatricalized and hermetic space for Dietrich's enactments.

Key to Zucker's overall characterization of Sternberg's "idea of the image" is the ambivalence of the contrasts alluded to above. On the one hand, these dualities invoke the traditions of religious icon-painting, representational indeterminacy serving "to create an object of veneration." (Zucker concludes her last chapter with an inventory of iconographic techniques and their Sternbergian analogues, among which, contra Mulvey, is an explicit neutralization of the erotic dimension of the image.) On the other hand, this focus on duality also allows for an explanation of the death of the Sternberg/Dietrich persona. If ambivalence encourages veneration for allowing a wide range of interpretive responses, the aggressive attacks on ambivalence (the explicit exaggeration *of* ambivalence) which culminate in *The Devil is a Woman* effectively disallow veneration by giving viewers little or no recourse to conventional (moral, narrative, sexual) reading strategies.

The Idea of the Image began as an NYU dissertation directed by William Rothman, and the title of Zucker's book evokes the title of Rothman's latest volume, *The "I" of the Camera.* Indeed, it is through the "I"of Sternberg's camera that our connection to Sternberg's films can be restored, despite the many disavowals they enact. Put another way, the "I" of Sternberg's image is not (finally) the persona embedded in a dramatic narrative—that persona departs for good at the end of *The Devil is a Woman*—but the persona evinced in the drama of narration, the drama of image construction and perception. That persona is Josef von Sternberg. As Zucker makes the point, in reference to *The Devil is a Woman,* Sternberg "demands that we accept Dietrich as his creation; when at film's end she returns to 'herself,' we recognize that 'self' as Sternberg's creation. The director poignantly asserts his authorship before releasing his 'bird of paradise'."

It would be easy to take these latter remarks as reinstating a simple-minded version of auteurism or intentionalism. But as Rothman points out in regard to Hitchcock—and as Zucker seems implicitly to assume in regard to von Sternberg—"while it may seem impossible" that we may know Hitchcock through his films, it is "no more impossible than that human beings are capable of expressing themselves in any other medium, are capable of expressing themselves at all." Zucker's argument that Sternberg's Dietrich films embody this mystery of authorship is a powerfully cogent one, especially in light of her often subtle and persuasive passage-by-passage analyses of individual films.

But another critical theorem is finally more important to our grasp of Zucker's claims and accomplishments. In *The World Viewed* Cavell implicitly denies the essentialist proposition that cinema can

be defined technologically. "The first successful movies—i.e., the first moving pictures accepted as moving pictures—were not applications of a medium that was defined by given possibilities, but the *creation of a medium* by their giving significance to specific possibilities." Underlying Zucker's argument regarding Sternberg is the conviction that our "idea of the image" is derived from a practice of criticism, of film and by film. Sternberg's claim to authorship is thus not something arrived at or accepted in advance. Rather, it is *because* Sternberg's images help create a medium by teaching us what its possibilities are that we are inclined to grant our acknowledgment. And what we acknowledge is not merely "von Sternberg" but our relationship to the cinema as such.

These are large claims to make in (on behalf of) so modest a book, claims made only a little less outrageous by a publishing coincidence which has given us mutually illuminating alternative versions of the same undertaking. Zucker's *The Idea of the Image: Josef von Sternberg's Dietrich Films* and Gaylyn Studlar's *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* are uncannily alike in a host of ways. Each began as a doctoral dissertation; each saw print in 1988; each takes Sternberg's Dietrich films as occasion for exploring our underlying relationships to the cinema; each explores the repetitively oneiric aspects of Sternberg's narratives and the iconic elements of his visual style, often in nearly identical terms, etc.

On several significant counts Studlar's is the more ambitious and up-to-date volume; her discussion of the "masochistic aesthetic" as providing a better explanation of visual pleasure than the reigning voyeurism/scopophilia model effectively confirms Zucker's basic case but also goes well beyond it in breadth of theoretical reference. Nevertheless, there are moments in reading Studlar when one wishes for closer, more sustained textual analysis than her Deleuzian superstructure allows for. In such moments, we can be glad that Zucker's book finally saw print. Along with Studlar and James Naremore and George Wilson, she provides eloquent testimony to the continuing variety and vitality of film studies, and to Josef von Sternberg's ongoing centrality to that enterprise. Testimony on both accounts is timely and most welcome.

LELAND POAGUE

From Hitler to Heimat

The Return of History as Film

By Anton Kaes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. $25.

A sort of "return of the repressed," the question of Germany seems to keep insinuating its presence in today's cultural criticism. In film studies in particular, the thinking out of contemporary Germany's relation to its complicated past has led to an exciting new wave of rigorous historical investigation in which textual analysis becomes linked inevitably to concerns with ideology and social meaning. For example, Thomas Elsaesser's *New German Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 1989) combines extensive charting of the economic and industrial structure of the German film industry with a theorization of the multiple subject positions offered by the films from that industry. Elsaesser wants to suggest the special difficulties New German Cinema faced in establishing its newness in a Germany still marked by the effects—both economic and psychological—of the war and postwar reconstruction. But Elsaesser's weighty tome is only the tip of an iceberg of compelling new investigations of German cinema's place in the contemporary social imaginary. Just as German historiography today is marked by an energetic "historikerstreit" (historian's debate) centered on questions of culpability and continuity with the past, so the new history of German *film* has become the site for a vibrant rethinking of fundamental questions of politics and culture.

Where Elsaesser offers a broad picture of the overall field of contemporary German film production, Kaes provides a complementary in-depth look at the ways a select group of recent films negotiate the German past by turning it into an object for critical and formal experiments. Kaes is a professor of German literature (at the University of California, Berkeley) and author of a book on German Expressionism, and *From Hitler to Heimat* seems to take from literary study a close analytic

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concern with the specific processes by which narrative works can represent and re-present history in complicated discursive forms. Inspired to a large degree by recent discussions of postmodernism as an activity by which the depths of historical reality are converted into sheer surfaces, into spectacles of meaningless plays of insignificant form, Kaes sets out to examine the loss of history in contemporary cinema. One example of that return of history as film that his book's subtitle refers to is the postmodern process in which a richly complex past turns into mere cinematic game, an absurd visual show. For example, Kaes centers the first of his readings of individual films on Syberberg's *Our Hitler* (1977) where Nazism becomes one sign among many in a film that speaks as easily of Edison and the Black Maria as of Hitler, and can so rewrite the past that Hitler comes rising up out of Wagner's grave.

Although he is influenced by current thinking on postmodernity, Kaes does not fall into either the pessimistic position that laments our captivation by empty images or the optimistic position that sees the postmodern play of signs as in and of itself liberatory. Kaes wants German cinema to engage rigorously with the German past, and he is critical of the ways postmodern experimentation can lead to a flow of images without perspective, without a committed position. Hence, he ends his discussion of *Our Hitler* with harsh criticisms both of the film's sheer blending or even confusion of all levels of history and historical knowledge and of the film's promise of a return to Germanic mythic thinking as a path beyond such confusion. For Kaes, the postmodern conversion of history into filmic spectacle is only one historical option for the cinema today, and he devotes much of his book to a sort of critical catalogue of the varying ways in which today's German cinema can take a position on history. Here, Kaes intends the main title of his book to refer to, but also mark a distance from, Siegfried Kracauer's classic *From Caligari to Hitler.* Where, as Kaes puts it, *From Caligari to Hitler* tells a single-strand story of how Germany's avoidance in the 1920s of an engagement with history led ironically to a vulnerability of the masses to new captivating powers in history, *From Hitler to Heimat* will focus "on the complexity of the films so that they begin to tell not *one* story but *many*" (p. xi). Not all films avoid history in the same way, not all engage with it in the same way, and the five readings in the book set out to demonstrate such filmic diversity in rigorous detail.

Beyond *Our Hitler,* Kaes's study offers close analysis of Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun,* Alexander Kluge's *The Patriot,* Helma Sanders-Brahms's *Germany, Pale Mother,* and Edgar Reitz's *Heimat.* Each film represents a different means by which contemporary German cinema engages with the pressures of Germany's contradictory past. *Heimat,* for example, uses the popular genre referred to by its title to critique the very ways German popular cinema often flees from history into myths of an unchanging German humanity close to the bountiful land; even if Reitz's film does at times seem to endorse a mythology of static village life, the ending of the film shows technology dramatically moving village life into a modernity it is ill-prepared for.

In another kind of reading, Kaes examines the ways in which *The Marriage of Maria Braun* uses a complex allegory to figure Germany's "progress" since the war in the narrative of a single life. But as Kaes notes, Fassbinder's recurrent desire to show the horrors of everyday German corruption in all its destructive banality leads to a cinema where it is hard to distinguish what is being critiqued from what is being endorsed. Although Kaes does not play chapter against chapter and tends to treat each film as a discrete exemplar, the ambiguities of *Maria Braun*'s personal allegory seem answered by Kaes's reading of Helma Sanders-Brahms's *Germany, Pale Mother.* Here, Kaes suggests another path for the merging of the personal and political as Sanders-Brahms centers her narrative on a woman but, in contrast to Fassbinder's allegorizing of the woman in light of a German teleology, she endlessly de-centers narrative subjectivity by showing all the tensions, pressures, twists, and turns the personal is subject to within a volatile national history.

Kaes's reading of the ways in *Germany, Pale Mother* that personal contradictions immediately replay political ones suggests his concern for a multi-strand cinema that produces knowledge through active assemblage and symptomatic juxtaposition. Even if Kaes resists postmodern confusion of all claims to historical truth, he does not propose a

return to a passive documentary cinema that would supposedly restore the history that experimental cinema covers over in spectacle and myth.

Significantly, *From Hitler to Heimat* begins with a highly critical discussion in which the failings of one example of just such a documentary cinema are juxtaposed with the spectacular powers of the Nazi distortion of historical documentability. In his opening pages, before the detailed readings that will make up the bulk of the book, Kaes offers two quick commentaries on the Nazi epic *Kolberg* and the anti-Nazi postwar documentary *Hitler: A Career* directed by Joachim C. Fest and Christian Herrendoerfer. Filmed during the last gasps of the Reich in a glorious color that Goebbels hoped would serve as a defense weapon against the ideological effects of Hollywood's world influence, *Kolberg* stands as one of the most extreme examples of history rendered as superficial spectacle.

But, as Kaes suggests, Fest and Herrendoerfer's ostensibly critical rejoinder to the seductive derationalizing charms of epic Nazi spectacle is no less in thrall to the filmic image's affective powers for a dehistoricizing captivation. Trying to move away from that mythifying approach that would impute Hitler's power to a sheer evil, a psychopathy, Fest and Herrendoerfer simply fall, in Kaes's account, into another myth, no less devoid of analytic content: that of Hitler as a great orchestrator of visual images, Hitler as great showman. As Kaes points out, the very extent to which *Hitler: A Career* includes clips of Hitler and Nazism performing their spectacle leads to the film doing little more than re-performing and replaying the aesthetic thrill of Nazi practice: "The carefully choreographed propaganda images of parades, public speeches, and party congresses [in *Hitler: A Career*] radiate an opulence and a suggestive power that clearly overwhelm Fest's voice-over comentary, which is supposed to explain the pictures. In the cinema, visual pleasure always triumphs over critical resolve: what we see, not what we hear, is primary. . . . The film thus replicates, intentionally or not, fascist aesthetics and recycles, once again, an arsenal of deceptive and demagogic images" (pp. 6–7).

Between a postmodern cinema (like Syberberg's) that reduces all modes of history to one grand myth and a documentary cinema that repeats the very seductions of the fascist aesthetics it attempts to subvert through critical display, Kaes searches then for another way in which today's German cinema might engage critically with the Nazi past. Inspired most evidently by Brecht, Kaes finds this cinema not in naive documentary realism nor in complicated unreal (post)modernism but in a *critical realism.* Against postmodernist experimentation and the reduction of meaning to the endlessly circular, a critical realism of the Brechtian sort assumes that truths about the world do exist but, against documentary realism, it assumes that they do so in a different form than the simple capturing of the physical look of things. One of Kaes's best (and most Brechtian) readings in *From Hitler to Heimat* concerns Kluge's *The Patriot,* which blends numerous voices in numerous styles to imagine the writing of history (and even the filmic writing of history) as an ongoing creation, an active process that Kaes likens to Bakhtin's notion of the "dialogic" or Lévi-Strauss's concept of "bricolage" (experimentally cognitive tinkering). As Kaes puts it, "Kluge's technique for dealing with history is both nomadic and analytic. . . . Like Brecht in his historical novel, *The Business Affairs of Mr. Caesar,* Kluge draws a sharp line between past and present; only if the reconstruction of the past is itself made the object of inquiry can the past be seen in a critical light. By recognizing the past as something foreign, something to be actively searched for and selectively reconstituted in the present, he is able to lift events, persons, texts, and images from their historical contexts and to use them as quotations. Benjamin's maxim, 'Writing history means quoting history,' describes Kluge's approach exactly" (p. 111).

It is highly appropriate that one of the back cover quotations for *Hitler to Heimat* comes from Fredric Jameson, who speaks of the book's "suggestive and stimulating" perspective on "problems of historical representation." Jameson is the cultural analyst who has most defined how it is the condition of postmodernity that accounts for our inability to plot effective narratives and allegories of history today, and Kaes's close reading of films that intervene in the re-presenting of history adds to the theorization of postmodernity a textual richness and diversity that takes current critical debates an important step further. Read with Elsaesser's *New German Cinema,* which provides the econom-

ic and social material detail that Kaes often only alludes to, *From Hitler to Heimat* stands as one of the most essential works on postwar German cinema. But, beyond its specific contributions to an understanding of a particularly German history, it offers profitable lessons to anyone concerned with film's role(s) as an effective contemporary form of knowledge.

DANA POLAN

Siegfried Kracauer

Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften

By Thomas Y. Levin. Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schiller Gesellschaft, 1989. DM 40

For most film people, Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) is probably best known as the author of *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological Study of the German Film* (1947) and *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960), two books whose secure position in the canon of film studies may have led many to erroneously conclude they represent all of his writings on cinema. Yet during the past two years Kracauer's work has become the object of intense and renewed interest, particularly the books, essays, and reviews he produced during the Weimar Republic in Germany. For nearly 30 years prior to the appearance of his book on German cinema in English, Kracauer was a prolific film and cultural critic, a close associate of figures such as Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, and a writer of dazzling virtuosity whose legacy includes two novels as well as countless essays on subjects ranging from courtroom trials to architecture to the quotidian details of urban life, but also encompasses hundreds of reviews of books, films, and theatrical productions by leading figures of the day. While increasingly well-known in Germany, virtually all of this material (contained in 22 published books and numerous uncollected articles) including the film essays and reviews Kracauer wrote while an editor at the prestigious newspaper, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, has never been translated into English, and still awaits a serious reception by film scholars in the non-German-speaking world.

In a labor of scholarly detective work that will undoubtedly facilitate such a reception, Thomas Levin combed sources in three langauges (Kracauer published in French while living in Paris from 1933 to 1941, but wrote almost exclusively in English after emigrating to America), discovered previously unknown essays published under nearly 20(!) pseudonyms, and has assembled the first comprehensive Kracauer bibliography, whose meticulous precision should provide historians of film and culture with much reason to be grateful. Published on the occasion of Kracauer 100th birthday by the German National Literature Archive, it is fitting tribute to a scholar who approached the fleeting and discontinuous phenomena of modern life and mass culture with the philologist's exactitude and respect for detail.

Yet Levin's bibliography is a book that invites one to use it, rather than simply admire the considerable labor that went into its production. Organized chronologically, it contains references for Kracauer's earliest publication in 1906 and concludes with posthumous editions of his books and letters issued in the 1980s. As an overview to the career of a major film critic, the bibliography is extraordinarily useful, but it is as a guide to German film and culture during the Weimar Republic that many scholars might find it most valuable and exciting.

For the film historian concerned with the German cinema and the reception of foreign films during the Weimar period, the bibliography's index of film titles (one of its six indices) makes it possible to trace Kracauer's evolving thinking about the medium as well as to obtain a rare impression of the cultural physiognomy of Germany in the 1920s. Turning to the entries for 1925, one finds references to reviews of films as well known as Murnau's *The Last Man* alongside accounts of others that have since disappeared into obscurity, and such juxtapositions produce a wonderfully defamiliarizing effect on the reader. The listings of Kracauer's book reviews and essays from the mid-1920s—studies on Stefan Georg, Tönnies, Nietzsche, and Simmel—are equally suggestive and anyone concerned with the interaction between film and philosophical ideas of the period will find much material for future research. As many readers of the several German anthologies of his writings on film have noted, Kracauer's nuanced class and gender analysis of Weimar cinema remains of the greatest interest to

ic and social material detail that Kaes often only alludes to, *From Hitler to Heimat* stands as one of the most essential works on postwar German cinema. But, beyond its specific contributions to an understanding of a particularly German history, it offers profitable lessons to anyone concerned with film's role(s) as an effective contemporary form of knowledge.

DANA POLAN

Siegfried Kracauer

Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften

By Thomas Y. Levin. Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schiller Gesellschaft, 1989. DM 40

For most film people, Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) is probably best known as the author of *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological Study of the German Film* (1947) and *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960), two books whose secure position in the canon of film studies may have led many to erroneously conclude they represent all of his writings on cinema. Yet during the past two years Kracauer's work has become the object of intense and renewed interest, particularly the books, essays, and reviews he produced during the Weimar Republic in Germany. For nearly 30 years prior to the appearance of his book on German cinema in English, Kracauer was a prolific film and cultural critic, a close associate of figures such as Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, and a writer of dazzling virtuosity whose legacy includes two novels as well as countless essays on subjects ranging from courtroom trials to architecture to the quotidian details of urban life, but also encompasses hundreds of reviews of books, films, and theatrical productions by leading figures of the day. While increasingly well-known in Germany, virtually all of this material (contained in 22 published books and numerous uncollected articles) including the film essays and reviews Kracauer wrote while an editor at the prestigious newspaper, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, has never been translated into English, and still awaits a serious reception by film scholars in the non-German-speaking world.

In a labor of scholarly detective work that will undoubtedly facilitate such a reception, Thomas Levin combed sources in three langauges (Kracauer published in French while living in Paris from 1933 to 1941, but wrote almost exclusively in English after emigrating to America), discovered previously unknown essays published under nearly 20(!) pseudonyms, and has assembled the first comprehensive Kracauer bibliography, whose meticulous precision should provide historians of film and culture with much reason to be grateful. Published on the occasion of Kracauer 100th birthday by the German National Literature Archive, it is fitting tribute to a scholar who approached the fleeting and discontinuous phenomena of modern life and mass culture with the philologist's exactitude and respect for detail.

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contemporary film studies, and through its provision of so thorough a guide to his film viewing and intellectual interests, Levin's bibliography should provide the foundations for a revitalized Kracauer scholarship in the future.

Reading through the list of Kracauer's writings, one longs for more translations of his Weimar period essays on film and culture into English; this embarrassing gap in Anglo-Saxon scholarship will receive a first correction when Harvard University Press publishes Levin's translation of Kracauer's *The Mass Ornament* in 1990.

EDWARD DIMENDBERG

Breaking the Glass Armour
Neoformalist Film Analysis

By Kristin Thompson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. $19.95

This anthology of essays stands as one of the most provoking, challenging, thoughtful, and rich film books of the past year. Thompson has not merely assembled a series of past publications, but has constructed a work that is both theory and demonstration, specific analysis and aesthetic argument. The book's unity may seem to derive from the extraordinary consistency of Thompson's approach—neoformalism—while its richness and variety comes from the range of films she deals with—from a 1946 Sherlock Holmes programmer to Godard's *Tout va bien*. But the book's multiplicity also derives from Thompson's neoformalist analysis which adapts itself to each film, comprising, as she puts it, one approach with many methods.

Unlike most works with a theoretical component, Thompson's book never gathers films as grist for a pre-set mill. The neoformalism starts from a film itself, its intriguing elements raising questions that are unique to each film. But there is nothing random about the way Thompson sets out to answer these questions. This book practices a rigorous and consistent approach to film analysis, albeit one which forbids foregone conclusions or formulaic responses.

With a title which makes the reader pause (and thus exemplifies her approach), Thompson focuses on the central concept of neoformalism—defamiliarization. Briefly summarized, defamiliarization holds that the essential role of art is to surprise us, to shake up accustomed habits of perception, so that we can experience a range of things freshly. Making us aware of the intensity and complexity of perception itself, to paraphrase Thompson, is one of the main aims (perhaps *the* main aim) of artistic experience. The radical nature of this concept lies in its scorn for the traditionally most revered of critical tasks, interpretation. For a neoformalist, art does not exist to carry meanings, and the unearthing of meanings through interpretation reduces rather than enriches an art work. Art transforms rather than expresses meanings, treating ideas as raw material to be deformed and refashioned—defamiliarized.

Defamiliarization appears on at least two levels in this book. Most prominently, Thompson reveals it at work in the films she discusses: from Tati's restructuring of gag structure to De Sica's deviation from Hollywood style to create an effect of realism. Equally important, Thompson defamiliarizes the films themselves. With the exception of the Sherlock Holmes film, *Terror by Night,* the book probes well known films by established directors. But its analyses rub against the grain: attacking critical commonplaces (e.g., Ozu's role as a "traditional" Japanese artist); defining a common reading with new precision (the Brechtian nature of Godard's *Tout va bien*); or directing attention to a neglected aspect of a familiar film (the importance of set design—not "deep focus"—for the realism of *Rules of the Game*). As Thompson's opening quote from Shklovsky indicates, art works themselves become too familiar, encrusted with a sort of glass armor, and it is the critic's role to do a little smashing.

But Thompson is hardly an anarchist. Her analysis is systematic, following her critical assumption that films are systematically unified, with devices on a variety of levels (narrative, stylistic, and ideological) subordinated to an organizing "dominant." It is her sense of these interrelations that make Thompson impatient with the easy satisfaction of interpretation. To take one example, in her tour de force treatment of the "lying flashback" in Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* Thompson dismisses reading the device as symbolic of the deceptions of art and cinema. Instead of "serving meaning" the film's

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omnipresent paralleling of deception and theater provides Hitchcock with a means of structuring the film through a defamiliarization of the mystery genre. The opening flashback, as Thompson puts it, plants a false question in the mind of the viewer ("How can Charlotte be proved to be the murderer?" rather than the appropriate question "Who really is the murderer?") and "everything in the rest of the film is at the service of keeping the deception going." A device is not a symbol to be assigned a meaning, but an element with a dynamic function, engaging the viewer's perception and unifying the film.

Thompson selects a broad range of films: *Terror by Night* as an ordinary film which nonetheless creates elaborate structures to maintain narrative suspense; unusually duplicitous films within the classical mode (*Stage Fright, Laura*); films commonly understood as "realist" (*Bicycle Thieves, The Rules of the Game*), and finally films Thompson describes as "parametric," foregrounding artistic devices and motivation rather than narrative functions (*Play Time, Sauve qui peut (la vie), Lancelot du Lac, Late Spring*). While her methods are shaped by the nature of each film, there are consistent principles. The concept of defamiliarization covers a multitude of artistic devices, partly because one can defamiliarize according to a number of backgrounds (Thompson lists the everyday world, other art works, and films with practical purposes). But at points the extremely individual treatment of each film seems to undermine the Formalist nature of her project.

For instance, Thompson's use of the term "the dominant" seems somewhat problematic. The dominant is a thorny issue in Formalist theory, and Thompson opts for Tynjanov's dynamic definition, in which the dominant of a work holds sway over other elements, deforming and subordinating them. Tynjanov's understanding of rhythm as the dominant in verse provides a clear example. In verse, other factors (such as semantics) are subordinate to rhythm, while in prose, whose dominant is semantics, the reverse is true. Thompson sees finding the dominant as one of the most important steps in analyzing a film and devotes the third section of her book to essays focusing on this task.

However, the dominants that Thompson finds constitute a rather bizarre series: for *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* the dominant is juxtaposition of boredom and humor; for *Tout va bien,* separation; for *Stage Fright,* deception and theater; for *Bicycle Thieves,* departures from Hollywood convention, motivated as realistic; for *Rules of the Game,* discrepancy. While all these terms have a very clear role in Thompson's analyses, their heterogenous nature indicates a concept rather different from most Formalist uses of the term. Whereas Tynjanov or Shklovsky discuss broad factors specifiable outside individual works (such as rhythm in verse, or the mystery genre in *Little Dorrit*), Thompson's dominants would have little meaning outside of her specific analysis (e.g., discrepancy in *Rules of the Game* refers to its juxtaposition of classical elements of performance, lighting, and decoupage to distinctly nonclassical ones). Although Thompson echoes the Formalists' claim that the dominant is an important term for historical analysis, one of the weaknesses of her selection of dominants lies in their too specific nature. How terms like "discrepancy" or "separation" could play an historical role becomes hard to imagine. They do, however, give a tight organization to Thompson's essays.

The neoformalist method seems, not surprisingly, most at home with parametric films which embody defamiliarization in its purest form, directing the viewer's attention to intricacies of perception and form rather than to realistic, genre, or narrative concerns. Thompson's analysis of Jacques Tati's *Play Time* crowns this book. Tati's title crystallizes Thompson's sense of parametric delights where the play with viewer perception becomes an end in itself. Thompson brilliantly reveals how the film's inconsequential narrative deflects the viewer's attention into a perception of the peripheral. Instead of absorbing this attention, Tati plays with it in unconventional ways, such as the defamiliarizing effect of the incomplete gag. The waiter's plate of dessert never gets dropped on the head of the dancers it so barely clears, but we know it *might* have and the gag remains, posed in the subjunctive. With gags that bleed through conventional expectations, Tati's film breaks down the borders of humor. As Thompson says, "It is difficult to tell what is *supposed* to be part of the humor in *Play Time*. . . . Everything begins to look strange and funny." This sailing over conventional limits ex-

tends past the film's apparent end. Thompson points out that the theme music which continues for several minutes after the end of the image track syncs with the audience's movements as they prepare to leave the theater, endowing the everyday world with the film's decentered perception.

I am not saying that the approach Thompson lays out is only useful for parametric films. The book claims that neoformalism can be applied to any filmic work of art, and I believe that it does reveal important aspects of all the films Thompson treats. However, only with certain films do I feel Thompson has provided the richest approach. Her ideological readings are mixed in their results, and their relation to the principles of neoformalism seems strained. The essay on *Late Spring* deftly punctures a view of Ozu as a defender of the traditional Japanese family by demonstrating that the film's treatment of the family is actually a modern one imported from the west, quite at odds with the traditional patriarchal *ie*. This is fine social history (although Thompson's rather bizarre statements about the solemn, nonhumorous nature of Zen and the lack of curtains in traditional Japanese theater—ignoring the use of the *agemaku* and the later *doncho*—don't give one confidence in her broad sense of Japanese culture. But it hardly seems to derive from neoformalist methods. Thompson claims that traditional Japanese culture does not form the best background against which to understand Ozu's films, but how one determines the proper background is not really explicated in neoformalist terms, perhaps because this task lies beyond it. Likewise Thompson's analysis of the ideology behind *Laura* does not seem to open new horizons, coming up with the sort of observations (Laura as an object for masculine control; the active virile detective contrasted with the impotent intellectual) that Thompson in other contexts delights to pronounce banal. Of course, Thompson believes the ideology of *Laura* is banal. But her judgment is guaranteed by a reduction of the film's complexity. Laura is hardly the passive *objet d'art* that Thompson (and Lydecker within the film) insist on. Her success as a career girl, her independence from the men in the film, are all qualities that set her apart from most women in forties detective films (presumably the proper background for such judgements), particularly given that she is not condemned for her behavior (as, say, Mildred Pierce seems to be).

Thompson's encounters with the films treated in this book are all unique and probing. Neoformalism foregrounds the perceptual and formal play of film in all its complexity. I believe there are questions about neoformalism as a total approach to film aesthetics, about Thompson's formulation of some of its concepts, and, as with every reading, room for argument about conclusions. But as a challenge to the general run of film criticism this book is bracing and revelatory.

TOM GUNNING

Chinese Cinema

Culture and Politics Since 1949

By Paul Clark. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. $39.50 cloth

Until quite recently, English-language film scholarship on Chinese cinema (including film in Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as the People's Republic of China) has been scant. With increased film production and growing contact between filmmakers and scholars in the PRC and their colleagues in the West, this situation has been slowly changing over the last few years. Special sections of *Jump Cut* and *Camera Obscura* and an entire issue of *Wide Angle* devoted to film in the People's Republic, for example, along with collections of essays by Chris Berry and George Semsel, have recently contributed to filling this void.[1] However, given the years of neglect, geographical and cultural distance of China, and general ignorance on the part of most film scholars, a great deal of work still needs to be done.

Paul Clark's *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* is one significant step in that direction. In this study, Clark ambitiously undertakes a comprehensive history of film-making in the PRC from its roots in the pre-1949 Shanghai-centered film industry to the emergence of the "Fifth Generation" of film-makers out of the Beijing Film Academy in the mid-1980s. The only other such attempt at chronicling Chinese cinema is the late Jay Leyda's *Dianying—Elecric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in*

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China,[2] which covers Chinese film from its beginnings through the start of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s. Whereas Leyda's book reads more like a personal memoir than an orthodox film history, Clark's book attempts a more scholarly, concise, and restrained presentation of the topic.

Unfortunately, the strengths of Clark's study are occasionally also weaknesses. Although concise, *Chinese Cinema's* 184 pages of text simply do not provide enough background information. For those not well-versed in the history of Chinese culture and politics, making sense of the relationship between the Communist Party, film-makers, and the Chinese film audience, which forms one of the book's principal themes, may prove difficult. This is particularly true in the crucial introductory portions of the text which take for granted a reader knowledgeable about the Long March, Yan'an politics and the already apparent rifts within the Communist Party, Guomindang vs. Communist politics before and during China's war of resistance against Japan, and other important issues.

Similarly, although political movements after 1949 are dealt with in more detail, the complexity of many of these movements, e.g., the Cultural Revolution, is lost in discussions which do not clearly place debates in film circles and the problems of film producers within a broader social context. Since the Cultural Revolution had such a devastating impact on the industry (causing almost all film production to cease for several years) and subsequent production has been dramatically marked by the movement, a more thorough investigation of the Cultural Revolution, as both a political power play among the highest levels of Chinese leadership and a seemingly genuine call for bureaucratic and social reform from students and others, seems warranted.

Moreover, although *Chinese Cinema* is clearly written and refreshingly free of jargon, a study of this scope would hve benefited from some explication of methodology or discussion of the cinematic and/or historical theories behind the author's approach to his subject. Unfortunately, the way in which Clark chose to collect and interpret his data remains obscure. This is particularly true in the criteria he used to determine whether to include or exclude a particular film for detailed discussion. Few films are given more than a cursory treatment, and, although *The Life of Wu Xun* (1950) and *Unrequited Love* (1980) were singled out because of the political debates surrounding their production, the decision to privilege certain films and completely ignore others seems, by and large, to rest solely with the author's own taste.

Clark describes *Yellow Earth,* for example, as "the best film China had produced since 1949." (179) Here, perhaps, the author's taste eschews his commitment to history, since this particular film is used to represent an entire generation, i.e., the Fifth Generation, and an entire era of Chinese cinema, i.e., the mid-1980s. As a result, influential works made around the same time, e.g., *One and Eight, The Girl in Red, Shaolin Temple, My Memories of Old Beijing, At Middle Age, Sacrificed Youth, On the Hunting Ground,* and *Garlands at the Foot of the Mountain,* among others, are not even mentioned in the index. Granted, a study must come to an end somewhere; however, by privileging *Yellow Earth* as the last film to receive extended analysis in *Chinese Cinema,* Clark reveals many of the shortcomings that plague the rest of his text.

For example, although Clark claims the growing influence of cinema as a mass medium is one of the central themes of his study, he is clearly most comfortable dealing with "art films" like *Yellow Earth* and least comfortable discussing popular cinema. Even in the chapter devoted to film genres (1956–64), the emphasis is on those works which received significant critical attention, e.g., *Two Stage Sisters, Early Spring,* etc., but which often had limited releases at the time of their production. The omission later of a film like *Shaolin Temple* really leaves a gaping hole in Clark's discussion of the 1980s. This Hong Kong coproduction marked a breakthrough in the 1980s because of its popularity inside and outside of the PRC, its attempt to combine Hong Kong and mainland cinema styles within a popular genre, and the significance of the popularity of its star, Li Lian-jie, in defining a national identity for a new generation of filmgoers. By ignoring the continuing importance of popular genres like the martial arts film (which was criticized, but did not completely dry up after 1983 as Clark states, since Li Lian-jie's *Born to Defence,* for example, was produced and released after that date), Clark also ends up giving little attention to one of the areas which has contributed to the "inter-

nationalization" of PRC cinema (another key theme of the book).[3]

In addition to this lack of interest in popular cinema, Clark also does not pay much attention to women currently working in the film industry nor to the history of the representation of women on the screen. Although Clark mentions Chen Bo'er and Jiang Qing, of course, he does not discuss films made in the mid-1980s by women like Zhang Nuanxin or Lu Xiao-ya at all. Except for the occasional comment made in passing, such as "Xie Jin is a director noted for producing strong portrayals of women" (103), Clark fails to discuss the relationships between changing social attitudes toward women and their representation on the screen, even though this has been a topic much discussed by critics both inside and outside of China. Given the significance of feminism within film criticism as well as within Chinese area studies today, it seems peculiar that a book-length account of Chinese film should do little more than mention the topic in passing.

Here, too, the lack of a stated methodology places the book in an analytical limbo. Since film theory is completely ignored, the ideological construction of images of women, sexuality, domesticity, class relations, minority groups, political movements, etc. is never dealt with in any significant detail. Because in-depth discussions of *mise-en-scène,* sound, editing, narrative structure, and other specifically cinematic elements of particular film texts are seldom included, the development of Chinese film language remains an untold part of the history of the industry.

Although Clark's insightful analysis of *Serfs* as an example of the minority peoples' genre is an exception to the general rule, most attempts at close analysis in the book do little to enlighten the reader about the development of film style in China. Clark's discussion of *Yellow Earth* as unambiguously supportive of the 1949 Revolution is a case in point: "The value of the subsequent revolution in land ownership, the position of women, and general social attitudes is here implied by the force of the film's presentation of people stuck on an earth that will not give them a livelihood." (180) Although this is certainly one interpretation of *Yellow Earth,* the film's ambiguous treatment of the impact of the Party on the lives of the peasantry cannot be denied, and the film could just as easily be read as a critique of a Party which naively believes it can implement social change when it is, at best, impotent, and, at worst, destructive. By producing his interpretation as *the* interpretation of this complex and controversial film, Clark actually does a disservice to a text which he ostensibly tries to praise.

However, although *Chinese Cinema* may be lacking in several important areas, there are many things Clark does exceptionally well. He is particularly adept, for example, at presenting the behind-the-scenes motives for controversies which may, at first, seem nonsensical or incomprehensible to the outsider. His analysis, for example, of the *Life of Wu Xun* debates shows his ability to piece together what was actually going on behind Mao's famous negative review of that film. It is a fascinating account of the politics and personalities involved and gives the reader valuable insight into how the Party exercised its authority over the film industry in the early 1950s. Here, Clark's ability to make dry documents like reports on political congresses and Party directives speak eloquently to the reader demands admiration.

In fact, as a general introduction to film-making in the People's Republic, *Chinese Cinema* has no competition. Unfortunately, although it would provide a readable text book for students of Chinese film, the cost of the book tends to price it out of consideration by many, who might otherwise use it in classes on Asian cinema, politics and the cinema, or survey courses on international film. Because of the lack of accessible materials on this significant national cinema culture, I would urge Cambridge to seriously consider bringing *Chinese Cinema* out in a paperback edition. Although recent developments in China do not bode well for the continuing growth and diversification of its film industry right now, hopefully, scholarly attention will not abate. A paperback version of Chinese Cinema could only help to fuel this interest.

GINA MARCHETTI

Notes

1. *Jump Cut* #31 (1986) and #34 (1989), *Camera Obscura* #18 (1989), and *Wide Angle,* Vol. 11, No. 2 (1989) all include special tributes to film in the People's Republic.

The Loud Silents
Origins of the Social Problem Film

By Kay Sloan. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. $24.95

There was a time, not so very long ago, when the predominant voices in film scholarship regarded the relation between cinema and society as clear-cut: *Everything* was dominant (bourgeois) ideology. This post-Althusserian notion has now fallen out of favor (though residues remain), and "historiography" has become a new term of respect. Historiography, however, poses an arduous model for film studies. It requires screening of films, research in archival documents, *and* organizing its material within a theoretical framework (which some historians neglect, assuming that data somehow "tells itself"). It is a dialogic practice, moving forward through often contentious dispute and debate. What it has yet to offer, despite a growing body of data and interpretation on film history, is a clear-cut concept of the relation between cinema and society.

These thoughts are prompted by Kay Sloan's *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film,* a brief but provocative contribution to several strands of discourse in film studies. In one area, it carries the useful model of Jim Purdy and Peter Roffman's *The Hollywood Social Problem Film* (1981) back into pre-"classical" silent cinema; in another, it engages the rich debate about the social, cultural, and class relations of early cinema; in a third, its origins as an American Studies dissertation mark the renewed vigor of that field's approach to film scholarship (along with recent books by Charles Maland and Thomas Doherty).

In five main chapters, *The Loud Silents* analyzes the concerns of early "social problem" films: capitalist malefactors, whom the author calls (borrowing a term from an early-twentieth-century sociologist) "criminaloids"; the downtrodden; labor unions; issues of sexuality, such as prostitution and birth control; and the woman suffrage movement. More than most previous studies, the work opens up to view the diversity of film-making practices in an era of cinema history when, as the author writes, "the motion pictures were seen as a medium that might be open to the public, particularly to those with a cause." (10) Advocacy groups produced some of the early social-issue films, occasionally by collaborating with commercial film companies.

As must any author dealing with the relation between cinema and society, Sloan raises the question of power: Who speaks through the cinema, or, perhaps more pointedly, what is spoken, and what are its prospects of being heard? Having shown that others besides profit-oriented producers had access to film-making, the author suggests nevertheless that the medium was more attuned to entertainment than enlightenment, that its métier was "fantasy" and "fairy tales." Though she repeats these terms often, they indicate her viewpoint on her subject more than they do a fully developed historiographic or theoretical structure for it.

"Fantasy" and "fairy tale"—concepts which in themselves receive little or no definition or analysis—are contrasted with "reality," as in: "The cinema transformed the real dilemmas faced by workers across the country into fantastic solutions that reinforced fealty to the corporate ideal and the work ethic." (58) Citing Eisenstein, the author asserts that "film was a potent political weapon to express the needs of the masses" (23); citing Brecht, she states that "the relationship of art to society must be that of 'a hammer, not a mirror'." (34) These quotes imply that revolutionary aesthetics are the standard by which Sloan finds early cinema deficient (to be sure, a not uncommon tropism in film studies), but that is not quite the case either.

What is lacking, rather, is a contextual framework for shifting and sometimes contradictory

Chris Berry, ed., *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. East Asian Papers, 1985). George Stephen Semsel, ed., *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1987).

2. Jay Leyda, *Dianying—Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).
3. Although the title of the book might imply otherwise, *Chinese Cinema* does not really deal with Chinese film industries outside of the PRC in any significant way. Some mention is made of film in Hong Kong before 1949; however, the growing importance of coproductions with Hong Kong and the increased contact between PRC and Taiwanese film-makers in recent years is not mentioned at all. Because the book was published well before the events of June 1989, no mention is made of their impact on current international ventures or domestic production.

perspectives. Though occasionally the relationship between entertainment and "reality" is treated as "fluid" (54) rather than opposed, more crucially missing is a broader sense of intertextuality and genre. Early cinema is regarded as an "original" (13) medium. The relation of its "fantasies" and "fairy tales" to other fictional forms is barely alluded to (John Fell's *Film and the Narrative Tradition,* for example, is not listed in the bibliography); nor is the possibility even raised that newspapers and photographs are not bearers of the "real," but are participants, in their own way, as much as cinema in the construction of "fantasies" and "fairy tales."

The power of the state is another contextual area that remains underdeveloped. Discussing early melodramas that questioned the fairness of the police and legal system, Sloan notes a reference in *Moving Picture World* to efforts by South Dakota legislators in 1913 to outlaw motion pictures depicting resistance to a police officer. "Such explicit censorship, however, probably was not necessary," (42) she asserts, on the grounds that film-makers by that time had already opted for a middle-class viewpoint on social matters. This neglects what is called (in the discourse with which Eisenstein and Brecht are associated) "determination." The role of state intervention—or its threat—in shaping narrative tropes in early cinema is left unexplored.

Sloan devotes several pages to the making of a woman suffragist film, *Your Girl and Mine* (1914), a collaboration between a US senator's influential daughter and Lewis J. Selznick's World Film Company. Yet when the film was finished, and had been privately screened to acclaim, World backed out on arranging commercial distribution. From the sources she has consulted, Sloan is at a loss to find an explanation. This perplexing example, and other occasions she cites when distributors as well as censors were opposed to advocacy films, suggests that the medium was not in fact open very wide to the "public," nor for very long.

Finally, what difference did it make? Woman suffrage was a movement that succeeded, after all. "The effect of the suffrage movement's films on winning support for their cause is difficult to determine," Sloan writes. (122) The effect of the many commercial comedies that lampooned suffragettes, however, is presumably less difficult to determine, because they failed to sway the nation to reject granting women the vote. The impact of early social problem films is another subject on which the author is ambivalent. Her views range from the notion that movie fantasy diverted spectators from taking effective collective mass action (the old revolutionary standard again) to the possibility that cinema's narrative structures "lessened the political threat of reform and added a human dimension" (74) and could assist in facilitating change.

The Loud Silents is a small book about big issues that need considerable further development. Kay Sloan deserves credit for focusing attention on a neglected area of early cinema history and on the challenge of formulating adequate historiographic and theoretical frameworks for linking cinema and society.

ROBERT SKLAR

Image and Identity

Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture

By Bruce Elder. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989. $39.95 (Cdn.)

It is not easy to find a book that compares with this one. While we have any number of histories linking national cinemas to political events or social trends, it is a rare undertaking that looks to film for an enunciation of a given culture's philosophical underpinnings. It is an even rarer work that argues, as Elder does here, for film as being central to the continuity of that thought. As he sees it, the work of that philosophy was to span the gap between the original settlers' "commonsense" responses to their hostile environment and the absolute idealism inherent in their Protestant traditions. Some 80-odd pages of weighty prose later, Elder concurs with Arthur Kroker's thesis that the current role of Canadian thought has been to internationalize that mediation. With Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and George Grant, Canada has undertaken a commitment to find a middle ground between America's pragmatic technologism and Europe's continual pondering of ideologies.

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Cinema, whose apparatus is both technological and ideological, serves as the middle ground of that middle ground. Yet to Canadians and foreigners alike, Canadian cinema has shown little in the way of memorable products. Part of the blame lies with just this spirit of mediation. Canada, after all, is a nation built without a revolution, civil war, or Wild West. Whatever their announced ideologies, Canadian governments are reasonable in their deference to local concerns. The much debated national identity is less important to the average citizen than the comfort of his or her niche in a well-protected multi-cultural mosaic.

In creating the National Film Board, John Grieron tapped this strain of negotiated social realism. Fifty years later, the Film Board has come to define that aesthetic as the standard for the national cinema as a whole. As a result, Canadian cinema boasts few adventure films or screwball comedies. Conflict is hard to come by. The bad guys are educable and the good guys tend to be an institution or social movement.

So what is wrong with a socially responsible, if humble, national cinema?

Elder, as he has for the better part of two decades, argues that the NFB opted for the wrong realism. As he wrote in his seminal 1985 manifesto, "The Cinema We Need," he would have preferred to see a realism of form over content, using the full prerogatives of the technology in a far deeper exploration of the human condition.

Image and Identity is an assembly of writing organized and reworked to buttress the arguments of "The Cinema We Need." Its strongest chapters are lengthy, laudatory passages on the work of Michael Snow and Jack Chambers. These are the artists, Elder contends, whose work embodies the Canadian obligation to reconcile the technology of cinema with the realities of the world it depicts. Films such as *Wavelength, Presents,* and *Circle* are also posited as transitions between modernism's anti-illusionism and Post-Modernism's demand for a reconsideration of representational imagery.

Elder's lengthy appreciations of Snow and Chambers are works that might well stand as a fine book and a respectable monograph in their own right. His articles on the NFB in the 1950s, his revisionist reading of *Mon Oncle Antoine* and his takedown of *Goin' Down the Road* are, if not as central to his contentions, also fine examples of a major critic and theorist at work.

Unfortunately, the vagaries of academic publishing were not as kind to Elder's classic condemnation of *Not a Love Story,* appearing here in butchered form. His survey of contemporary Canadian experimental film-makers also falls victim to space limitations. Nor is it clear why there is no conclusion to a work that is otherwise so thoughtfully structured. An updated version of "The Cinema We Need" would have worked wonders.

Nevertheless, in his strong explications of Snow's and Chamber's films, Elder more than makes his point. Like a cinematic Stephen Hawking, he patiently unravels a long line of logic until we can conceive the world inside out and backwards. For him these experimental sensibilities are the norm, the perceptual peace that humankind may have with its moving image technology. It is entirely fitting that discussions of those millions of dollars of features and that unbroken string of documentaries are fragmented or missing. From Elder's perspective, these are the products of the Flat Earth Theory.

Is Elder right? And, if so, what difference could it possibly make? Is anybody, North or South of the border, likely to grant primacy to the experimental cinema?

Elder's argument is finally something of a tautology. Experimental cinema is the most appropriate venue for the exploration of form simply because that is what experimental cinema mainly does. If one is simply looking for a tool that may precisely respond to thought, to art, to important realities, there is no question that this is the cinema we need.

In American culture, the argument might well end here with the rejoinder that if you want to send a message, try Western Union. The dominant cinema is there to be dominant. Partisans of the American avant-garde are, by self-definition, renegades in the great American tradition.

Canada shares no such heritage. Its endlessly insecure culture seeks reconciliation with loud voices. Experimental film-makers, among the loudest of those voices, are accorded the protection granted any struggling ethnic group. Their influence is proportionately closer to that of the routinely marginalized feature film and all too common documentary. Given the deluge from south of the border,

most of Canadian culture shares the same swamped boat.

In this cultural context, Elder's tome is an argument with a future. Great sums will not be shifted away from the creative accountants, well-pensioned civil servants, and colorful entrepreneurs who produce most of Canada's moving imagery. But the culture is small enough to feel the need to listen. Hopefully, the resulting dialogue will be widely available should the rest of the world ever request that long-proferred Canadian mediation.

SETH FELDMAN

The Cinema of Apartheid

Race and Class in South African Film

By Keyan Tomaselli. Chicago: Lake View Press, 1988. $29.95 cloth, $11.95 paper

Tomaselli, editor and publisher of the South African media journal *Critical Arts*, is one of the most astute and prolific media scholars in South Africa. In this book he develops a methodology for the study of racist modes of film production within a white nationalistic cinematic tradition. Afrikaan films tend to focus on agrarian Boer life and espouse populist ideals.

Tomaselli critically analyzes the rise of an Afrikaan-controlled South African cinema. In his discussion of censorship and control by subsidy, he describes how the Afrikaan ethnic group increased their control over the South African film industry. Early in the book, the author studies the socioeconomic importance of Afrikaans language films and the economic value of increased subsidies for such films. Tomaselli writes, "The growth of Afrikaans, the most recent of world languages, was largely due to its promotion by the South African mass media: first print, then radio."

In 1969, however, the government increased subsidies for Afrikaans language films by 10% while subsidies for English language films remained at 44%.

Tomaselli shows that the Afrikaan government's monopoly over South African film resulted from (1) the government's increased subsidies for Afrikaans-language films, and (2) the Afrikaan-dominated financial control of film production, distribution, and exhibition. He writes, "The Afrikaner insurance giant, SANLAM, bought out the 20th Century-Fox interests, which gave them control of production, distribution, and exhibition."

Unfortunately, the author does not offer reasons why the American company allowed such a buy-out. Nor does he discuss the effect of the indifference of international film scholars to the plight of Afrikaan-controlled South African film. Some questions that Tomaselli could have answered include: Did American criticism force 20th Century-Fox to sell their South African film interests? And if this was the case, why was the anti-apartheid movement so short-sighted as not to foresee that the Afrikaans would take control over the South African film industry? An analysis of the anti-apartheid movement's socioeconomic effects on the South African film industry should have been discussed during the late 1960s. This is especially true since Tomaselli's purpose is documenting the cinema of apartheid—an international rather than a national problem which makes a mockery of the free and democratic world.

Nevertheless, Tomaselli offers a most interesting insight to black film studies and any film studies of people of color. He writes, "The desire for a totally black crew will not necessarily lead to the making of critical films. Liberation lies not only in technical expertise but in counter-ideological commitment allied to a theoretical knowledge of cinema and its role in society." This understanding of black control of what I call "black-modes-of-creative-production" links race to a liberation ideology rather than merely black control over the means of production. When discussing black-oriented films which have been produced, directed, and/or written by whites and "uncommitted" blacks, media studies must use theoretical methodologies which distinguish certain forms of race and gender empowerment as well as discern the various ideological strategies that film-makers have chosen to represent the black community.

Interestingly, Tomaselli avoids simplistic racial dualisms in which black over white control of the film product produces a politically "correct" black film. But he does not acknowledge the importance of technically skilled blacks in an industry that is predominantly white. Even in America, where technical unions racially discriminate, the presence of

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The Cinema of Apartheid should be read by those interested in understanding why and how the South African film industry attracted an urban black audience without denying the dogma of apartheid. Such an understanding may offer insight into how American television serials and films attract large African-American audiences.

MARK A. REID

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Dada and Surrealist Film

Rudolf E. Kuenzli, ed. New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1987. $24.95 cloth, $12.95 paper

Is there anything new to say about surrealism and, say, Buñuel's *Un Chien andalou*? I was dubious when I picked up Rudolf Kuenzli's collection of 14 original essays, but Stuart Liebman proved me wrong. In his contribution, *"Un Chien andalou:* The Talking Cure," Liebman holds that the film "must be heard as well as seen" and proceeds to intrigue the reader with a careful analysis of the verbal (read: French) surrealism in the film. Take the opening sequence of the moon, the young woman, and the man (Buñuel himself). Liebman introduces the implications/connotations of "la lune" for French and comes up with several intriguing possibilities that expand our appreciation for Buñuel's film. "Tomber de la lune" means to look blank or "moonstruck," an apt description, holds Leibman, for this young woman who stares blankly "as if she has fallen from the moon." He then continues, explaining that "la lune" in France "is routinely associated with female buttocks." One can imagine what surrealistic play such imagery produces.

Not every essay in the collection is up to Leibman's level of playfulness and intellectual alertness. But taken as a whole, Kuenzli has done film studies a service by gathering some of the best minds in the fields reflecting on specific topics. Linda Williams accurately describes four critical "waves" in Buñuelian reception (the Surrealist Buñuel; the realist Buñuel (Marxist-humanist); the auteur; and, the latest stage, the "Semiotic and Lacanian Buñuel"). And she deftly wraps up Buñuel's career suggesting that the slit eye in *Un Chien andalou* becomes, at last, in *That Obscure Object of Desire,* the attempt to sew the torn and bloodied garment, "the perpetual but incomplete attempt to reconnect the edges of a wound."

But the center of this stimulating collection is the work done on those Dadaists and Surrealists less known than Buñuel. David Wills, who has recently published a book on deconstruction and cinema with Peter Brunette, *Screen/play,* here examines Robert Desnos's early interest in the language of film (1922–30) to suggest much about the

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nature of cinema as a "system of traces, fragments and ruptures." By focusing on Desnos's employment of "rupture" in his texts and by juxtaposing his work with Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier's studies of Eisenstein and film language, Wills's article illuminates not only Desnos but adds to our understanding of film in general.

Kuenzli, coeditor of *Dada/Surrealism,* provides a cogent working model for the difference between the two perspectives in his short introduction. Surrealist film-makers, he writes, "largely rely on conventional cinematography (narratives, optical realism, characters) to create their visions, while the Dadaists in their effort to "defamiliarize the familiar world" never allow "the viewer (to) enter the world of the film."

The extensive bibliography is not only helpful for further study, but testimony as to how far analysis of surrealism and cinema has come in a decade since such works as Michael Gould's *Surrealism and the Cinema.* My only true disappointment is that Kuenzli has kept too religiously to the classical texts of the subject and thus has missed the chance to go beyond the original "movement" to see in what sense surrealism has survived, evolved, and appeared in more contemporary works, including video. ANDREW HORTON

Women and Film

Edited by Janet Todd. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988.

The project of *Women and Film*, a collection of essays edited by Janet Todd, is clearly articulated in the introductory essay by James Lynn. Contemporary feminist criticism and theory have failed to embody a historical component and Lynn calls for a reconceptualization of the feminine as a "changing constellation of moments." Under the banner of "historical feminism," *Women and Film* attempts to historicize feminist film criticism, to resituate its nexus of psychoanalysis, semiotics, and structuralism in the "shifting history of female subjectivity under patriarchy." Such an enterprise is not without value. As Judith Mayne argues, in what may well be the anthology's best essay, "The Female Audience and the Feminist Critic," feminism needs to address the construction of the female audience "in the course of film history." To fail to do so is "to risk developing a kind of tunnel vision that never sees much beyond the livingrooms of contemporary feminist critics watching 1930s and 1940s movies on television."

Part of the problem with *Women and Film* is that, as a collection, it lacks a rigorous or even consistent methodology to articulate its project. This stems from its concept of historiography, variously and sometimes vaguely defined by the individual contributors. There is a tendency to equate historiography with historical context or even biography here, resulting in pieces highly reminiscent in methodology and tone of the "images of women" approach exemplified by Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape.* Haskell's text is a pioneering work surely, but one that should be the starting point for a new historicity, not its model. There is an anti-theoretical subtext to many, though not all, of these essays—as if historiography and feminist theory are mutually exclusive. This yields such curious positions as Anga Vlasopolos's claim that the woman's film has been critically neglected when, in fact, the woman's film was the starting place for many of the developments in feminist theory in the 1970s. Vlasopolos's position seems particularly odd given some of the titles she includes: *Stella Dallas, Now, Voyager*, and *Mildred Pierce.*

The vexing and complex questions inherent in historicizing a theoretical discourse such as feminist criticism are barely asked. Again, it is Mayne who recognizes the complexity of these issues. Warning against the tendency to conflate the historical female with the contemporary feminist, Mayne asks on what basis is the audience to be reconstructed? What types of evidence are available to the researcher? What are the factors that limit reliability?

Not every essay shares the concerns of the introduction; in fact, some of the most successful work in the anthology seems largely peripheral to Lynn's invocatory call for historicity: Susan Léger's "Marguerite Duras's Cinematic Spaces," and E. Ann Kaplan's "Discourses of Terrorism, Feminism, and the Family in von Trotta's *Marianne and Julianne.*" Although both essays nominally inject a note of historiography, their most convincing arguments derive from theoretical discourses which

nature of cinema as a "system of traces, fragments and ruptures." By focusing on Desnos's employment of "rupture" in his texts and by juxtaposing his work with Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier's studies of Eisenstein and film language, Wills's article illuminates not only Desnos but adds to our understanding of film in general.

Kuenzli, coeditor of *Dada/Surrealism,* provides a cogent working model for the difference between the two perspectives in his short introduction. Surrealist film-makers, he writes, "largely rely on conventional cinematography (narratives, optical realism, characters) to create their visions, while the Dadaists in their effort to "defamiliarize the familiar world" never allow "the viewer (to) enter the world of the film."

The extensive bibliography is not only helpful for further study, but testimony as to how far analysis of surrealism and cinema has come in a decade since such works as Michael Gould's *Surrealism and the Cinema.* My only true disappointment is that Kuenzli has kept too religiously to the classical texts of the subject and thus has missed the chance to go beyond the original "movement" to see in what sense surrealism has survived, evolved, and appeared in more contemporary works, including video. ANDREW HORTON

Women and Film

Edited by Janet Todd. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988.

The project of *Women and Film*, a collection of essays edited by Janet Todd, is clearly articulated in the introductory essay by James Lynn. Contemporary feminist criticism and theory have failed to embody a historical component and Lynn calls for a reconceptualization of the feminine as a "changing constellation of moments." Under the banner of "historical feminism," *Women and Film* attempts to historicize feminist film criticism, to resituate its nexus of psychoanalysis, semiotics, and structuralism in the "shifting history of female subjectivity under patriarchy." Such an enterprise is not without value. As Judith Mayne argues, in what may well be the anthology's best essay, "The Female Audience and the Feminist Critic," feminism needs to address the construction of the female audience "in the course of film history." To fail to do so is "to risk developing a kind of tunnel vision that never sees much beyond the livingrooms of contemporary feminist critics watching 1930s and 1940s movies on television."

Part of the problem with *Women and Film* is that, as a collection, it lacks a rigorous or even consistent methodology to articulate its project. This stems from its concept of historiography, variously and sometimes vaguely defined by the individual contributors. There is a tendency to equate historiography with historical context or even biography here, resulting in pieces highly reminiscent in methodology and tone of the "images of women" approach exemplified by Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape.* Haskell's text is a pioneering work surely, but one that should be the starting point for a new historicity, not its model. There is an anti-theoretical subtext to many, though not all, of these essays—as if historiography and feminist theory are mutually exclusive. This yields such curious positions as Anga Vlasopolos's claim that the woman's film has been critically neglected when, in fact, the woman's film was the starting place for many of the developments in feminist theory in the 1970s. Vlasopolos's position seems particularly odd given some of the titles she includes: *Stella Dallas, Now, Voyager*, and *Mildred Pierce.*

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Women and Film carves out an earnest, worthwhile, and potentially rewarding agenda for itself: to turn the resources of historiography toward feminist theory. This is not an easy project and it is not fully realized here.

KATHRYN KALINAK

Television Culture

By John Fiske. London & New York: Methuen, 1987. $13.95 paper.

Over the last fifteen years, there has arisen a formidable body of exciting scholarship that has attempted to describe, define, and understand our most pervasive medium of art, entertainment, and information. With the appearance of Eric Barnouw's *Tube of Plenty* (1975) it became clear for the first time that television had an intelligible internal history. With Horace Newcomb's anthology *Television: The Critical View* (1976) it was made apparent that television was worthy of serious study by critics and commentators who were cognizant of, but not enslaved by, the canon of Great Works in Western Literature. With J. Fred MacDonald's trilogy of perceptive studies, *Blacks and White TV: Afro-Americans in Television since 1948* (1983), *Television and the Red Menace: The Video Road to Vietnam* (1985), and *Who Shot the Sheriff? The Rise and Fall of the Television Western* (1987), we came to understand important aspects of the linkage between television and contemporary American social history.

John Fiske's *Television Culture* attempts a particularly adventurous and ambitious synthesis of neo-Marxist social theory, semiotics, and post-structuralism. This "cultural studies" approach to media criticism has taken root at the more progressive communications, literature, and English departments in American universities.

In realizing this synthesis, Fiske develops a cogent response to radical critics of the media who have tended to over-emphasize the exploitative and hegemonic dimension of commercial television programming. Fiske points out that the very popularity of certain television programs can be attributed to the "ability and freedom of the viewer to bring extra-textual experience to bear upon the reading of the program."

At the same time, Fiske is well aware of the fallacies of the liberal pluralist model of television criticism, which tends to underplay the structures of social and economic domination that inform private for-profit television systems. In addressing the deficiencies of both the radical and liberal critiques of television, Fiske manages to rescue the study of television from the strategic impasse between the "dominant ideology" thesis and the speciously neutral market-driven relativism of liberal arguments.

Fiske's analyses skillfully trace the insertion of conflicting social, economic, cultural, and political ideologies within the television text. For example, he examines the meaning of gender in the soap opera and in male-oriented action-adventure programs such as *The A-Team*. He also scrutinizes quiz shows and news programming to demonstrate the ways in which disempowered groups resist the one-dimensional rendering of dominant social ideologies.

Fiske's work is full of implications for a "reading" of the social text at large by bringing into clear focus the relationship of popular culture to the structures of political-economic power. *Television Culture* should lead not only to a revitalized research agenda, but to a renewed political agenda as well. It is destined to become a classic in the field.

DARRELL Y. HAMAMOTO

On Video

By Roy Armes. London & New York: Routledge, 1988. $47.50 cloth, $12.50 paper.

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tributable, I believe, to the mixed feelings about video which apparently underlie the basic stance of the book. These feelings are probably symptomatic of the larger field of film scholarship whose subject matter is no longer culturally central and whose dominant theoretical paradigm is no longer at the cutting edge of thought on contemporary culture. That is, though Armes ostensibly embraces the displacement of film by "video," to which he attributes a kind of messianic potential, his basic assumptions remain within a filmic paradigm not appropriate to video texts and his thoughts continue to return to the love object he never wished to abandon. Thus, his book announces a transition which is retarded at the point of actual execution.

Armes doesn't baldly state his distaste for video—one must glean this from a few vague remarks on work in video to date,[4] as well as his critique of video aesthetics, which makes up a minor portion of the book. But the absence of any substantial analysis of work "on video," despite the title of his book, leads to this conclusion. Nowhere, not even in the brief discussion of the aesthetics of video sound and image late in the book, is there a single example or citation from a video text—even there Armes choses all his examples of sound-image relations from movie classics (*Last Year at Marienbad*, *The Big Sleep*, *Persona*, *Double Indemnity*, etc.).[5] He justifies this on the ground that most readers won't be familiar with a body of video work—which is probably true, but isn't one purpose of a book on video to rectify this situation?—and argues that film and video share a lot anyway (except, as he notes, video's emphasis on sound, especially "extra-diegetic" sound, a difference which is the apparent point of the first two parts of the book, on media history.)

Armes suggests two major aesthetic failings and one economic limitation of independent video: first, video (actually, unnamed videos) tend to emphasize long takes with blocks of synchronous sound and image, and thus do not fully take advantage of the possibilities in playing sound and image off against each other. He attributes this apparent over-simplicity to the material base of video tape and the "naturalism" of synchonization which it so effortlessly achieves. In many of his explanations, technologies and techniques determine the essence of a medium. This technology is, in turn, utterly determined by "capitalism." Thus, he can write that there is "no doubt" about the ideological role of the video camera: "It is openly, transparently, both an instrument for celebrating what *is*, rather than what could be achieved with social change, and, at the same time, a machine for making life seem more pleasurable than it is." (197) Armes's second criticism of video art concerns contrivance, or excessive and unmotivated use of electronic effects for effects' sake. The temptation to excess, he believes, is inherent in video's dependence on expensive and elaborate electronic post-production facilities.

It is hard to assess or share Armes's judgments on the video milieu and its products without textual referents, analyses, or proofs of any kind. (Nor does Armes introduce the existence or counter the tenets of a growing literature on video art.) Even if one accepted his tacit view of a particular cultural situation, the important thing to ask is why and how it came to be. The video art with which I have become familiar over the last several years, including mediocre work as well as masterpieces, is not simply or merely excessive, but is rather a form which suffers in public acceptance from its discursive complexity. So, for instance, a long take is not necessarily a simple, linear unfolding of an event, but may actually simultaneously present multiple events at different levels of space and time. The tools of film analysis tend to reduce aspects of complexity in video to a single concept like "sound" or "extra-diegetic" (that is, everything that is outside of the imaginary realm in which a story unfolds.)

Armes contradicts his previous differentiation of video, film, and television (his view of television's "liveness" was debunked long ago in television studies) in his aesthetic sections, in which he claims that any image that moves is narrative (195), that sound editing works just like the suturing system of film, and that dialogue within a story and extra-diegetic commentary are really the same thing (despite his recognition in the section on mode of address that they are not).

Though he espouses documentary and avant-garde film as models for video, Armes also seems to fault video for the very economic and cultural marginality it shares with these two filmic modes. He finds independent video production "economically insignificant," its history of two decades not possible to write about "as a creative medium." (155) Video has "yet to find its particular equation of creativity and economic viability" (161) in order to enter ". . . the mainstream of commercial audiovisual production." (205) (Note that the adoption of video tape instead of film stock that Armes espouses in production is hardly a problem in the United States. Indeed, many are the laments about the virtual disappearance of film formats under 35mm, the very ones identified with documentary and independent film. Armes also seems to think it makes a significant difference whether a rock video for television is shot on film or produced entirely on video—he espouses the video format, yet prefers an aesthetic schooled on film.)

The major portion of the book is not "on video" at all, but consists of a revisionist history of sound and image recording. Armes attacks the exclusion of the

treatment of sound in his teleological view of audiovisual technology. His emphasis on sound may be unusual in the work of film historians and theorists—though his own discussion has recourse to some of them—but is not uncommon in the media histories produced in the field of communications studies. Certainly Armes's desire to place video as a medium within a larger technological and sociocultural context is laudable, though his history may be too brief and summary to be useful as a primer for students. Because we live in an electronic environment and for reasons of cost, many schools which once emphasized film studies have now switched to video. There is a need for books which would guide students of video production in the possibilities of the medium as well. But there is doubt whether this book will meet these practical needs, generally, and especially in an American context. His desire to free video production for formal experimentation is laudable, though his suggestions on the "range to which video may aspire" (152) seem more prescriptive and restrained than modes of expression actually being developed in video art. But he has not met the need to provide students of cultural criticism with a model for the evaluation of video art and entertainment as it actually exists.

—MARGARET MORSE

Notes

1. Armes has written, among other things, *The Cinema of Alain Resnais* (1968), *French Cinema* (1985) and *Third World Film Making and the West* (1987). He is now a Reader in Film and Television in a program of hands-on video production at Middlesex Polytechnic.
2. "Video" seems a slippery concept here, since, as Armes notes, it refers to the base material and electronic technology of recording, and/or of editing and/or of rerecording and distribution, as in narrative films on cassette. In Armes's sections on aesthetics, "video" refers equally to programs for broadcast television recorded on tape as well as independent productions shown in altenative venues, such as video festivals, alternative spaces or Britain's Channel Four. Elsewhere the referent seems to be an empty potential on video tape itself.
3. Whereas actual video is marginal, potential video is ". . . the key final link in a complex chain of developments in both image and sound reproduction." (p. 9)
4. Armes writes, ". . . although video's potential has been seized on by some artists, the body of video art cannot at present be said to match the achievements of electronic tape music." (86) And again, "There is no body of video art to equal the achievements of electronic music." (112) (The book often repeats itself.)
5. As for other "audiovisual" textual references, there are at best but the briefest mention of television shows (*Boys from the Blackstuff, It'll Be All Right on the Night, The Muppet Show, Nature, News at Ten, Z Cars.*)

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